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GUEST EDITORIAL

BEHIND EVERY STRONG PERSON IS A STORY THAT GAVE THEM NO CHOICE

Dave Hayward

The title of this editorial is my new favorite saying from my Facebook friend Calisto Harvalias, gay man extraordinaire and community organizer.

It speaks to all of us who are LGBTQ. Those who have "imbecilic determination" to be activists are evoked, especially those who soldiered forth when Pride was unpopular.

Once I connected with a young man who exclaimed, "Wow, you've assisted every Atlanta Pride since 1972, when you were fighting for the right to have gay bars." No, honey, I corrected him, we were fighting the gay bars!

In 1972, I sat at a Georgia Gay Liberation Front meeting and heard, when we leaflet the Cove and the Sweet Gum Head, we're going to be thrown out. Their reactionary manager Frank Powell warned, "We don't want any of that radical shit in our bars!"

This was problematic, as the Cove on Monroe Drive was the premiere after-hours gay club (the joke was you would leave the Cove and the sun would be coming up). The Sweet Gum Head on Cheshire Bridge was the creme de la creme show palace, renowned for Diamond Lil and her campy drag and for Rachel Wells (the still alive and well John Greenwell) and his cyclone glamour, so incandescent that Rachel was featured in Burt Reynolds' "Sharky's Machine."

I thought, I'm not going to be thrown out of a gay bar. I already had battle scars from protesting multiple carding policies at gay bars in Washington, D.C., but then I was outside and the bar goons (rumored to be Mafia) couldn't get to me.

A survival skill I recommend is this: run sheep run and live to fight another day. So, while picketing and dying in and sitting in for 50 years, I am both proud and ashamed to never have been arrested. That's some kind of commentary on our much-beleaguered Bill of Rights, that you can agitate and still walk on home.

So, I volunteered for parking lot duty at the Cove. I can still see my beloved GGLF brother Kevin fly through the air as he was keelhauled through the Cove's swinging saloon doors. He didn't break any limbs, but for God's sake, talk about overkill.

The silver lining (and there's always one) is that once Pride passed boisterously but peacefully, the bars let us register voters on their premises.

Once again, our leaders had no choice but to lead. GGLF co-chair Bill Smith wanted badly to be in office, but the call to social justice was stronger, and he led us down Peachtree Street bellowing, "What do we want?" "Gay Rights!" "When do we want them?" "NOW!"

The next day he reported for his accountant's job at City Hall, and no one would speak to him. All he did was fall out laughing about it.

Judy Lambert was co-chair along with Bill and resolved to stand for bisexual rights along with her husband Phil. Judy and Bill were profiled on a TV talk show, and she declared, "I want to replace affectation with an effective way of living." Judy was grilled by other women for being part of the patriarchal Gay Liberation Front (when we assumed "gay" included all of us), but she would not be moved, and she was already in love with her bisexual husband anyway.

Charlie St. John was born with a cleft palate and labored all his 40 years to be understood. Charlie compensated by using his 6'2" height to maximum advantage, happy to intimidate whenever politic. In 1972, he secured a permit for the Pride March, unlike in 1971 when the permit was rejected, and when asked, "How closely will the marchers march together?" retorted, "Very closely!" Atlanta Mayor Sam Massell rewarded Charlie and the GGLF with Georgia's first openly gay political appointment, to the Atlanta Community Relations Commission in early 1973.

Atlanta native Paul Dolan became legendary as his nom de la plume Severin and reveled in being nonbinary and gender nonconforming in a beard and mustache and swirling black and white evening gown. He and Atlanta musician Ricky Commins headlined many concerts and Severin parlayed his signature song, "I'm Tired of Straight Men Fucking Over Me!" into a popular anthem. In 1994, I went to the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall Exhibit at the Seagram Building in New York and was thrilled to see Severin in all his late glory as the first picture. Identified as an anonymous protestor, I ran up to the Seagram folks and said, "He's not anonymous, that's Severin!"

Finally, Steve Abbott toiled with his longtime friend Gus Kaufman, still an activist here, to make the media cover LGBTQ rights and freedoms, most notably as writers for the Great Speckled Bird, one of the foremost alternative newspapers in the country. In 1971, Steve penned a cartoon for The Bird extolling Atlanta and Georgia's very first Pride March and inviting all to come no matter their orientation. Later, I learned that Steve was married with a baby girl, Alysia, and could easily live on the down low. But he was LGBTQ editor of *The Bird*, and that was that.

The greatest grace note is that Alysia published a best-selling memoir, "Fairyland," about her life with Steve as an openly gay father who passed from complications of AIDS. Oscar-winning director Sofia Coppola optioned her book, and it has just completed shooting as a major motion picture, with Oscar winner Geena Davis and "American Idol" finalist Adam Lambert in the cast.

Somewhere, somehow, sometime, there's justice after all.

Dave Hayward is coordinator of Touching Up Our Roots, Georgia's LGBTQ Story Project.

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Report Finds Number of Trans Youth Has Doubled in Five Years

A report from UCLA's Williams Institute has found that the number of young people who identify as transgender has nearly doubled

The report, which was released this month, uses survey data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System to estimate how many Americans identify as transgender.

The data reveal that while the number of adults who identify as transgender has remained steady since 2017, when the last report was published, the number of trans teenagers ages 13 to 17 has nearly doubled. Approximately 18 percent of trans people are teenagers (up from 10 percent in 2017), despite making up less than eight percent of the population. 24.4 percent of trans people are 18 to 24, making 43 percent of the transgender population young people despite the age group making up only 19 percent of the general population.

Those in younger age groups also appear to have a higher percentage of transgender people overall. 1.4 percent of teenagers 13 to 17 and 1.3 percent of those 18 to 24 identify as trans, compared to 0.5 percent of those 25 to 64 and 0.3 percent of those 65 and older.

"Advances in gender identity data collection over the past five years have provided a more accurate picture of youth in the U.S. who identify as transgender. Previously, we could only estimate that based on adult data," lead author Jody L. Herman, Senior Scholar of Public Policy at the Williams Institute, said in a press release. "These new estimates show us that current policy debates regarding access to gender-affirming care and the ability to participate in team sports likely impact more youth than we previously thought."

Florida Moves to Ban Medical Care for Transgender Youth

Within hours of a report issued by the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration recommending state health officials disallow healthcare services for treatment of gender dysphoria for children and adolescents in the state, Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis' administration asked the state board regulating doctors to essentially ban transition-related care.

Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis' administration asked the state board regulating doctors to essentially ban transition-related care. PHOTO BY SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / HUNTER CRENIAN

In a letter that was obtained by *NBC 6* in Miami, Florida Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo wrote:

The current standards set by numerous professional organizations appear to follow a preferred political ideology instead of the highest level of generally accepted medical science. Florida must do more to protect children from politics-based medicine.

Otherwise, children and adolescents in our state will continue to face a substantial risk of long-term harm. The agency ultimately concluded that 'available medical literature provides insufficient evidence that sex reassignment through medical interventions is a safe and effective treatment for gender dysphoria.'

I encourage the board to review the agency's findings and the department's guidance to establish a standard of care for these complex and irreversible procedures.

The 46-page report justified banning Medicaid coverage for transgender people of any age who want puberty blockers, hormone therapies or gender-assignment surgery.

NBC 6 pointed out that the two-pronged effort ensures that DeSantis can act quickly and without the need for legislative approval.

The World Professional Association for Transgender Health and the United States Professional Association for Transgender Health condemned the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration for issuing what those organizations labeled a misleading and distorted report that aims to deny Medicaid coverage for trans health care.

"Florida's assault on transgender communities has been relentless. This latest attack from the agency that oversees the Medicaid program comes just two months after the Department of Health targeted medically necessary health care for trans youth."

As stated in USPATH's detailed position statement responding to Florida's actions: "These efforts lack scientific merit, and in some cases misinterpret or distort available data, or otherwise lend credence to individual opinions in the literature that are at odds with the overwhelming majority of experts and publications in this field.

Florida's health agencies have an obligation to support the health and wellbeing of its residents, including those who are transgender. The state has instead chosen to issue misleading and dangerous reports designed to harm transgender people. WPATH and USPATH will continue to challenge each and every one of these unconscionable attempts to thwart trans health care."

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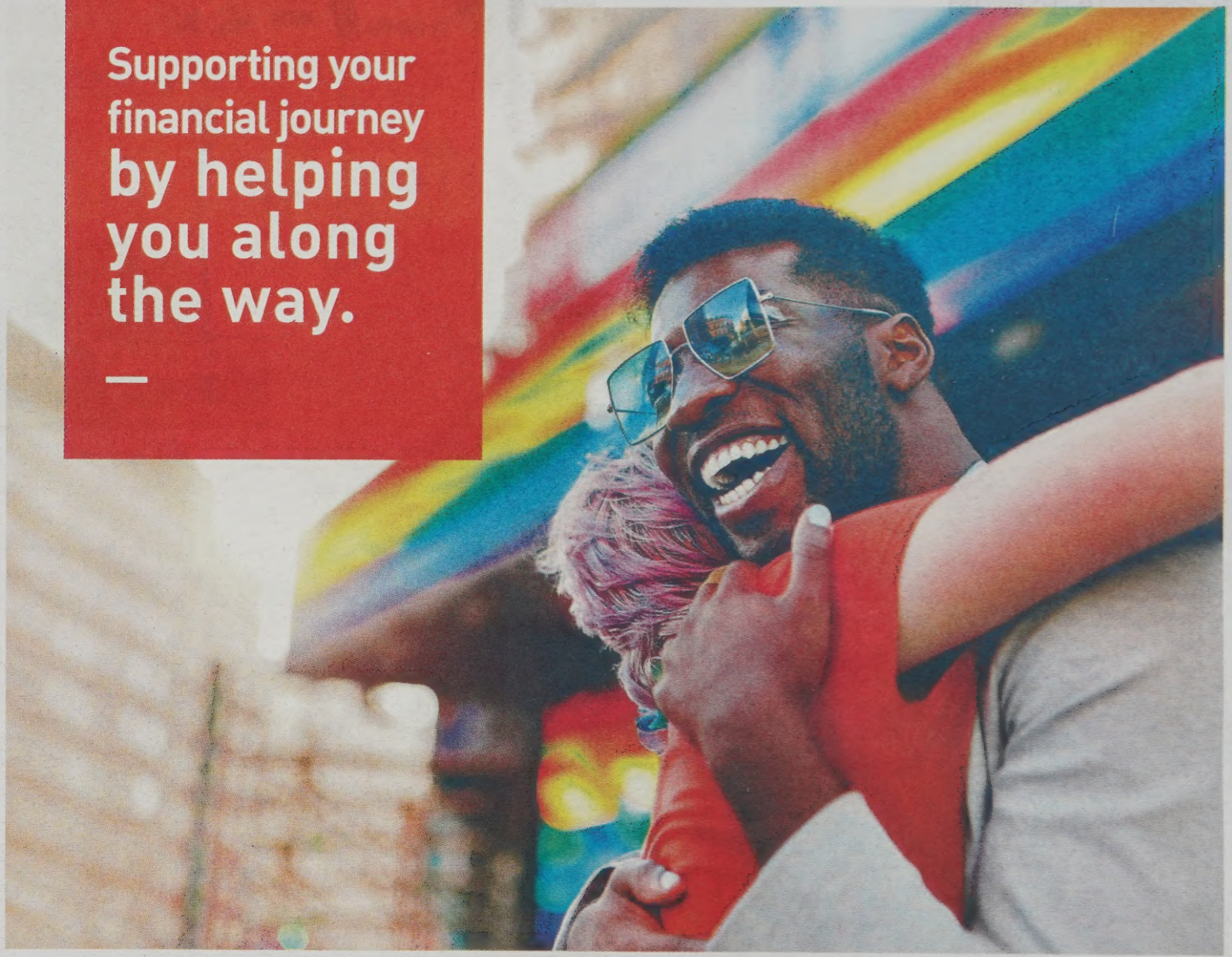

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Conservative Organization Endorsing Gov. Kemp Urges Supporters to Reject Pride

Katie Burkholder

A conservative organization that has publicly endorsed Gov. Brian Kemp sent an email to supporters at the start of Pride month urging them to "intentionally reject" Pride.

Frontline Policy Action is a "state-focused, biblical organization that … address[es] issues of life, religious freedom, educational opportunity, God's design, human dignity, free speech, and principled government," according to its website. The organization released its endorsement of Gov. Kemp on May 5 ahead of the primary election, in which he won the Republican gubernatorial nomination.

"Time and again, our Governor has led the charge for our values — willing to stand up to the elites, the media, the pressures, Hollywood, and woke institutions," Cole Muzio, the President of Frontline Policy Action, wrote in the endorsement. "And, through it all, I have had the privilege to see how he has endeavored to walk with the Lord, cherish his family, and serve the people of this state. He is a man of integrity, a devoted husband and father, and a leader we can trust."

Less than a month later, on June 1, Frontline Policy Action sent an email to supporters with seven tips on how to "reject Pride." *Georgia Voice* obtained a copy of the email.

"In 2022 America, the month of June is co-opted by those who want to embrace evil, 'groom' our children, and seek to pass their warped distortion of human sexuality as 'normal,'" the email read. "It isn't normal. You don't have to accept it. And, as a Bible-believing Christian, you are called to reject a radical ideology that encourages people to be 'proud of sin.'"

"The LGBTQ+ lifestyle is exactly that — sin," the email continued. "And the LGBTQ+ Agenda is a desire to normalize sin, to impose 'acceptance' of sin on others, and to 'groom' a rising generation to view anyone willing to stand for truth as hateful, bigoted, and narrow-minded."

Gov. Brian Kemp PHOTO VIA FACEBOOK

The email went on to list seven ways to "intentionally" reject Pride month: deny money from those who promote Pride month, speak out on social media, urge your pastor to discuss "God's Design for human sexuality," ground your family in "God's Word," make your marriage inwardly and outwardly joyful, vote for a candidate that "supports God's Design," and donate to Frontline Policy Council, the organization's nonprofit arm.

Gov. Kemp's office did not issue a proclamation endorsing Pride month this year, and while advertisements for Gov. Kemp's 2018 campaign were found on Grindr, he did not explicitly attempt to appeal to LGBTQ voters, even failing to respond to an LGBTQ acceptance survey from GLAAD. During his term, he has consistently advocated against the LGBTQ community. While he signed SB 164, which modernized Georgia's HIV laws, he also signed HB 1084, which creates an athletics committee with the authority to ban trans youth from playing on gender-affirming sports teams. He not only signed the bill into law, he also personally visited both the House and Senate chambers during the final hours of session to push legislators to pass it.

Gov. Kemp's anti-LGBTQ leadership has had an impact on the state. According to a report from Out Leadership published this month, the 2022 Out Leadership State LGBTQ Business Climate Index, Georgia ranks 33rd in the country for LGBTQ equality with a state index score of 52.73 out of 100. In the category ranking the governor's political and religious attitudes, Georgia received a one, the lowest possible score on the five-point scale.

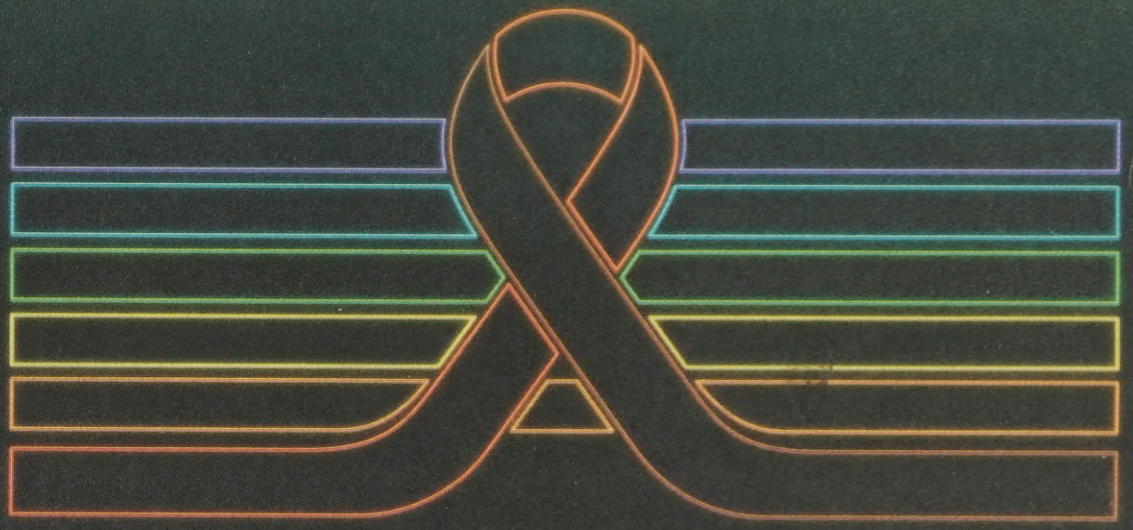
FRONTLINE POLICY ACTION
WINNING FOR FAMILIES

"In 2022 America, the month of June is co-opted by those who want to embrace evil, 'groom' our children, and seek to pass their warped distortion of human sexuality as 'normal.' It isn't normal. You don't have to accept it. And, as a Bible-believing Christian, you are called to reject a radical ideology that encourages people to be 'proud of sin.'"

— Exerpt from an email sent by Frontline Policy Action to their supporters

"The data reflects a troubling trend: too many states are mortgaging their future in order to be discriminatory against LGBTQ people," the report reads. "Despite the best efforts of a few governors standing in opposition to their legislative counterparts, states are betting that short-term wins in the culture war will outweigh long term losses in talent recruitment, innovation, and consumer trust."

Gov. Kemp will be up for reelection in November against Democrat Stacey Abrams. *Georgia Voice* reached out to Gov. Kemp's office for comment and received no response.



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MOVING FORWARD WITH YOUTH ACTIVIST Rhea Wunsch

Katie Burkholder

As we look to the past and honor the history that came before us, we can move forward. Young LGBTQ people are taking the work of their predecessors and doing just that. One such person is Rhea Wunsch. The 20-year-old is a student at Georgia State University studying public policy with a concentration in public management and governance, a minor in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and a certificate in social action. Wunsch was honored last year as one of Atlanta Pride's grand marshals for her work with community organizing and activism.

We sat down with Wunsch to discuss her activism, how young people are leading the fight against gun violence, exploration of self among LGBTQ young people, the existential dread of Generation Z, and more.

Quotes have been edited for clarity. Read the full interview online at thegavoice.com.

When and how did you get involved in activism?

I first got involved in my freshman year of high school, in 2016. Donald Trump got elected, which even in the eighth grade I was like, 'That's not going to happen. There's absolutely no way America is going to vote for Donald Trump to become president.' And then we did. It turns out the people I thought would be smart and logical voters weren't being smart and logical voters. So, I decided to get involved. I had no idea what I was doing at first. The first event I hosted was in Piedmont Park called the Political Postcard Party. It was a letter-writing campaign, we had people stop by and write letters, and I sent them out to all our Georgia representatives. From there, my activism grew.

In 2018 was when the Parkland shooting happened, and it was the first time in my experience that young people were making a space for themselves in the political world. I was working on the Stacey Abrams campaign, and I got involved in March for Our Lives. I'm actually with them in D.C. this week lobbying for gun violence prevention measures.

Can you talk more about your work with March for Our Lives?

March for Our Lives is a completely youth-led gun violence prevention organization. We've been around for a bit over four years; it started after the Parkland shooting in Florida. It was a call to action for young people, because gun violence is an issue that my generation has grown up with. We've done lockdowns, we've dealt with school shootings. It's something my generation is extremely passionate about. March for Our Lives is the biggest organization involved in that.

This week, we're in D.C. We have almost 200 people here, including students, teachers, grandparents, we even have a fifth-grade student lobbying with us this week, she's 11 years old. We're meeting with people on both sides of the aisle. In the Senate, we're trying to pass universal background checks, and on the House side we're trying to pass the Protecting Our Kids Act *[the Protecting Our Kids Act passed in the House after this interview].*

Youth activist Rhea Wunsch PHOTO VIA FACEBOOK

Last year, you were named one of Atlanta Pride's grand marshals. How did that feel? Was that an exciting accomplishment?

Yeah, I was really excited about it because I remember the first time I went to a Pride parade. It was a magical thing. It's really exciting because I know it's a big accomplishment; Stacey Abrams is a previous grand marshal.

Honestly, I thought I was too young to win it, so it was really exciting to get the call.

Speaking of you being young, in this issue we're connecting LGBTQ youth with LGBTQ history. So, I would like to talk about what it's like to be a young person in 2022, and specifically an LGBTQ young person in 2022, as compared to — or rather, informed by — years past.

I feel like, even in Georgia, people are more accepting than ever. Especially within my generation, there's a lot more room to explore. That's something that's been missing. I know people who have been trying to figure out their gender, so they've been switching their pronouns back and forth for years, they've tried out several different names. There's a lot of opportunity to figure out who you are, which is really credited to the older people in the movement who have been doing this work for so long. I want to say thank you to the people who have been in this movement and who've given us this room to explore our genders and sexualities in a safer environment. Obviously, there are things that aren't completely safe everywhere in America, especially in Georgia. But I think it's something, moving forward, people are becoming more accepting of.

On a more negative note, I know a lot of young people today experience some existential worry based on the status of the world at the moment. Like with this anti-gun violence campaign, a big reason so many young people are involved is because young people are being affected by it, even elementary school-aged children. Is that something that resonates with you?

I work in activism, there's a lot of bad news every day. I think that the climate crisis is a big part of that, because at the end of the day, in 10, 20, 30 years, it could all just be over. It is terrifying to think about. There's always the question of if this is going to mean anything, or are we all doomed? But I also think we're making strides, and that's something activists need to focus on. Even on a citywide level, there are good things happening.

But it does feel existential at times. Everywhere we turn, there's an economic crisis, there's climate change, there's another mass shooting. It's exhausting work to do, and it's overwhelming a lot of the time. But if we continue to work on this, we can fix it.

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Remembering the Otherside Lounge Bombing 25 Years Later

Sukainah Abid-Kons

Until 1997, Otherside Lounge was a popular lesbian bar and nightclub that sat on Piedmont Road. The bar, which was referred to as a "ladies club" by some newspapers in the wake of the attack, was a popular spot for members of the LGBTQ community to congregate, especially on Friday nights and weekends. Beginning in 1990, Otherside was a place in Atlanta that offered a safe, social environment for Atlanta's lesbian community. But on February 21, Otherside Lounge was changed forever. At approximately 9:45 p.m., a bomb on the patio exploded.

The Otherside Lounge SCREENSHOT PHOTO

Though not perfect, some members of the LGBTQ community who lived in Atlanta found Otherside to be a place where they could express themselves, especially in comparison to other small towns across Georgia and the South.

"Atlanta was exciting, the Braves were winning, the Olympics were coming, and the city was just filled with this energy that was amazing," Fran Collins, a survivor of the attack, told *Georgia Voice*. Collins had moved to Atlanta from a small town and loved the atmosphere of the city.

"Around that time is when I attended my first Gay Pride march, here in Atlanta," she said.

But the excitement that coursed through the city would soon turn into anxiety. Leading up to the night of the attack, Atlanta had witnessed two other bombings in the city, leaving residents and police alike on high alert.

That Friday night, Collins went to Otherside Lounge with her girlfriend at the time, who wanted to celebrate a friend's birthday.

"I reluctantly went," Collins recalled.

It was a normal night at the bar. Collins' girlfriend showed her around, even taking her out to the patio. Collins said it was so cold outside that she only stepped out onto the patio for a moment.

"If we had stayed out there, it would have been life-ending," she said.

Collins got a drink and then headed over to the pool tables to play with her partner and other patrons. At approximately 9:45pm, the first bomb went off. Located outside, the vibrations and noise meshed with the loud house music in the lounge, but people quickly knew that something had happened.

Collins said that conversations stopped, and patrons in the bar didn't know what had happened. Then, smoke and the smell of explosives drifted into the bar and Collins and her girlfriend crouched down, but didn't leave the building.

"At that time, we didn't know if it was gunshots [...] it was just mass confusion," Collins said.

Undercover cops who were working across the street came running into the bar and instructed everyone to leave the building and gather in the parking lot. Soon afterward, police, medics, and firefighters arrived.

Shortly thereafter, a second bomb went off. Luckily, no one was standing in the vicinity, but it still inflicted significant damage to the surrounding area, including to Collins' girlfriend's car, which was completely totaled.

While the event caused no deaths, five patrons were wounded and the establishment was never able to recover. In 1999, Otherside Lounge shut its doors for good.

"People say that five people were injured that night, but no. Everyone that was there was injured in some way," Collins said.

The attack was motivated by the perpetrator's hateful feelings toward the LGBTQ community. The attacker, who was apprehended, is intentionally not named in this article at the request of Collins.

The bombing was a quarter of a century ago, yet it seems eerily similar to incidents that have happened in just the past decade. The Pulse Nightclub shooting, which led to more than 50 deaths, was also motivated by anti-gay sentiments and echoes the incident at Otherside.

In recent years, Collins has found that younger people in Atlanta's LGBTQ community have no knowledge of the Otherside Lounge attack.

"I want people to know that this can happen at any place, any time," she said.

And it seems that this is a pressing time to remember events like Otherside. Anti-gay and trans hate crimes are still prevalent in the United States; 2020 saw an increase of nearly 3,000 recorded incidents in comparison to the year before. Out of the nearly 8,500 anti-gay hate crimes recorded in 2018, only 27 perpetrators were prosecuted, and 20 were sentenced.

"History can repeat itself, and no matter how far we move forward ...] there's always danger," Collins warned.

The Otherside Lounge bombing serves as a reminder that, in Atlanta, the gay community has created a city where Pride is celebrated, where business owners can be out of the closet, and where people can hold their partners' hands in public. But it also shows us how much progress we have yet to make in order to create a citywide community that is safe for all.

Collins concluded with a quote from Armistead Maupin that she said came to mind while reflecting on the attack: "the world changes in direct proportion to the number of people willing to be honest about their lives."

Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance

Katie Burkholder

In honor of the 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA), there will be two Zoom events happening this month.

ALFA was formed in 1972 as a breakaway from Atlanta's Gay Liberation Front and Atlanta Women's Liberation. In an article published in August 1972 in the counterculture newspaper *The Great Speckled Bird*, the group described their mission

"We are a political action group of gay sisters," they wrote. "We are the large coordinating group for smaller consciousness raising groups and an umbrella group for Women's projects and gay Women's projects. We will serve as a communications center for all these groups. We intend to provide alternatives for ourselves and all sisters that will free Women to live outside sexist culture. We aim to reeducate the non-homosexual community, society in general, by being visible and vocal at every opportunity. We aim to reach out to all sisters in order to establish solidarity. We intend to work with gay brothers to further our mutual goals of gay liberation. We intend to initiate demonstrations and public actions to emphasize our demands."

ALFA was the first out lesbian organization in Georgia and was formed by a group of lesbians and feminists who had been activists in a multitude of movements of the time, including those for Civil Rights/Black Empowerment, Women's Liberation, anti-war/anti-imperialist, and workers' rights/anti-capitalist movements. ALFA was a combination social and political organization which held and valued women-only space before eventually dissolving in 1994. Over the years, other lesbian groups and organizations found their roots in ALFA and the lesbian network it created.

At both events, co-founders and members of ALFA will share some history on the organization and others that came from it.

The first event, sponsored by lesbian literary and art journal Sinister Wisdom, will happen at 7pm on June 21. The one-hour event will include speakers like ALFA co-founders Lorraine Fontana and Elaine Kolb and members Margo George, KC Wildmoon, and Maria Helena Dolan. The talk will be moderated by Julie Enszer, editor of Sinister Wisdom.

The second event is sponsored by the Georgia State University Women and Gender Archives and will be held at 7pm on June 23. Speakers include Fontana, Kolb, and George, plus Helen Schietinger, one of ALFA's co-founders; Eleanor Smith, who will speak about disability access issues at ALFA and Feminist Women's Chorus, a group that grew out of the ALFA community; and Chris Carroll, who will speak about Lucina's Music, another group that grew out of ALFA. There will also be a video of Frances Pici speaking about the Red Dyke Theater. The talk will be moderated by Morna Gerrard, archivist of the Women and Gender Collections.

The GSU Archives event will also include video clips and photo galleries as well as a Remembrance photo display of some of the ALFA community members who have passed. There will be a question-and-answer segment at the end. Links to more information on speakers and ALFA will be posted in the chat as the program progresses.

You can register for both Zoom events through the link in this article on our website, thegavoice.com.

Remembering Traxx and Texas: Atlanta Black Gay and Lesbian Nightlife Back in the Day

Craig Washington

Read the full article online at thegavoice.com.

Phillip Boone and Jocelyn Lyles PHOTOS VIA FACEBOOK

Soon after my arrival in Atlanta in July 1992, I came upon a surging Black gay nightlife, which helped convince me that relocating from New York City was worth the risk. There were plentiful watering holes that made for a lush social landscape. These were spaces intentionally carved out for people who were Black and queer like me. They provided communal joy, pleasure, and relative safety. I made time to get reliable stories about two such spaces from two individuals whose contributions deserve far wider recognition: Phillip Boone, former owner and co-founder of TRAXX/Warehouse Atlanta, and Jocelyn Lyles, co-founder of Hospitality Atlanta, which ran the women's parties at Texas.

Boone left a declining Detroit in the winter of 1982 for Atlanta at the suggestion of his cousin David Hampton, who was attending Morehouse College. Along with his roommate Durand Robinson, Boone moved to the Atlanta Overlook, an Old Fourth Ward apartment complex known for its abundance of Black gay male residents. In 1983, Boone and Robinson began throwing "All You Can Drink" parties, which quickly drew a following.

"The reason why we started giving parties is that we would try to get into certain [white] clubs and we would need three pieces of ID," Boone told *Georgia Voice*.

Boone, Hampton and Robinson, and Homer Smith marketed themselves as "The Ritz Boyz" because they all worked at the Ritz Carlton Hotel. Recognized as the Father of Black Pride, Henri McTerry was an iconic event planner who worked closely with the Ritz Boyz. In 1989, Hampton became the manager of the Phoenix aka The Warehouse, renamed after the legendary Chicago club. Hampton then persuaded the owner to reserve a Black gay night which in turn established the TRAXX Saturday parties.

Boone and Hampton became the owners of TRAXX at 306 Luckie St in downtown Atlanta. It was a cavernous palace with two floors, loft-like ceilings and an atrium. While large clubs could be easily found in Washington D.C. or New York City, Black gays in Atlanta had never seen such a sweeping facility designed for them. Bars like Foster's Lounge, Loretta's and the infamous Marquette were community favorites, but they were limited to smaller crowds.

By 2004, Traxx relocated to the Atlanta Live/Dekalb Events Center. As more women started to join the guys, the Ritz Boys partnered with Melissa Scott to develop Traxx Girls. One of the few surviving entities from the era, TRAXX Girls is now an "entertainment company specializing in providing captivating events for women who love women."

Jocelyn Lyles was one of the founding activists who hosted women's parties at a restaurant named Texas and developed the Black lesbian organization, Hospitality Atlanta. Following her graduation from Howard University in 1978, Lyles moved to Atlanta, where she came out and met her first girlfriend.

Once Lyles began organizing in Atlanta, she encountered white gay men organizers who were resistant to working with Black lesbians.

"Charlotte Shaw, Charlene Cothren, Sandy Joshua, and I joined forces to entertain Black lesbians in Atlanta because we needed something that's going to be exclusively ours," she recalled.

Cothren was a well-known activist who founded *Venus Magazine*, one of the most popular Black LGBTQ periodicals of its time. Cothren persuaded the downtown restaurant known as Texas to host women's parties on Saturday nights. Their crowd grew exponentially in little time.

Given that it was an era when Atlanta offered few options expressly for Black lesbians, Texas was a much-needed oasis. Atlanta's LGBTQ infrastructure was dominated by white gay men and to a lesser extent white lesbians, while the emerging Black LGBTQ social scene mostly catered to Black gay men.

Black women enjoyed the Otherside (known for its R&B nights) and Sports Page, but they were not Black-centered.

Core members were receptive to women's interests beyond partying and founded Hospitality Atlanta.

"From the parties, we had all kinds of events, DJ competitions, theme parties," Lyles said, "and from that grew the relationship seminars and a Black women's business event in Colony Square."

Hospitality Atlanta launched what would become its hallmark event, a Memorial Day weekend retreat at Georgia's Red Top Mountain. Within the first three years, the event tripled in attendance, and they had to rent several different spaces to accommodate women coming from all across the country.

Both Boone and Lyles noted the limited number of entertainment venues that currently cater to Black LGBTQ Atlantans. Boone has left the club promotions field and now works for Ventura, a distributing company for restaurant products. He is considering a special reunion event to honor Traxx.

Lyles points out that LIA (Ladies In Atlanta) promotes Black lesbian entrepreneurship, organizes day parties, and recently sponsored trips to Key West Pride (2021) and DC Pride (2022). Lyles was a board member for Zami NOBLA, a renowned advocacy organization for older Black lesbians. She now works with the APD Code Enforcement of Atlanta and is preparing for retirement.

Outside of private functions, visible Black LGBTQ nightlife is disappearing along with the de-gaying of midtown Atlanta. We have fewer brick and mortar sites now than we did when I arrived here 30 years ago. However, if one generation had the conviction to build that which did not previously exist to meet their needs, then so could another. We do not need to replicate the past in order to meet today's needs for Black LGBTQ-affirming public spaces in Atlanta. I look upon of the models of TRAXX and Texas. I marvel at the creativity embodied by Phillip Boone and Jocelyn Lyles, and the achievements of the Ritz Boyz and Hospitality Atlanta, and I think anything is possible.

Mrs. P's Bar and Kitchen is located inside the Wylie Hotel COURTESY PHOTO

Wylie Hotel Honors Mrs. P's History with Tea Dances All Summer

Katie Burkholder

The Wylie Hotel will be hosting historic LGBTQ tea dances all summer long.

Every Sunday this summer, there will be historic tea dances, updated to the 21st century, held at Mrs. P's Bar and Kitchen inside the Wylie Hotel. Guests will enjoy refreshing summer beverages and tasty treats such as fresh ceviche gazpacho, smoked salmon crostini, Spanish fruit bowl and more while dancing the day away from 3 to 7pm.

Tea dances were afternoon events, originating in '50s New York, organized to create a space where gay men could meet and congregate. Because it was illegal through the mid-1960s to sell alcohol to people known to be gay, NYC police would conduct raids on bars where they knew alcohol would be served to the LGBTQ community. So, tea was served rather than alcohol.

Around the same time, Mrs. P's Tea Room opened in the Ponce de Leon Hotel. It quickly transitioned into Atlanta's first openly LGBTQ bar, known as a leather and western gay bar, years before the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Mrs. P's is a mainstay of Atlanta's LGBTQ history — it is known as the home of Atlanta's first drag show and was where the late Atlanta drag legend Diamond Lil first began performing. The bar was one of the first safe places for LGBTQ Atlantans until a final police raid in the early 1980s closed it down.

Named in homage to its historic predecessor, Mrs. P's Restaurant and Bar is located inside the Wylie Hotel, which opened in 2021 in the same building on 551 Ponce de Leon Ave NE that Ponce de Leon Hotel used to reside. Mrs. P's Bar & Kitchen, a refined Southern eatery, is located street side at the forefront of the hotel alongside a sunroom and outdoor terrace.

Valet parking will be offered but rideshare is encouraged. For more information, visit wyliehotel.com and mrspatl.com.

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IN DEFENSE OF THE Young Gays

Cliff Bostock

I'm writing this a few days before another birthday in the month of Pride. As always, I ruminate senility's question: "How will I know when I'm dead?" I have solved that conundrum. I will know I am dead when I find myself in the Colonnade at a table listening, as always, to old gays complaining about young queers. I will stand up from the table and run to the door. There will be no exit. I will be trapped. I will be dead.

The conversation is always the same. "Young gays have no idea what it was like before we changed everything for the better. They don't know our history. They don't know what it's like to get drunk and fuck in a bar bathroom instead of hooking up online. We had such fun, we were a community."

Let us agree at the outset that ignorance is often fun. Let us also agree that while old people have more memories, we are as ignorant as young people. While we remember the emergence of gay life in the '70s, most of us still know next to nothing about our history before then. That's because our history wasn't told. I remember as a high school kid jumping on the bus in Sandy Springs to visit the downtown public library. I'd find a nook where nobody could look over my shoulder and read about homosexuality. I never found a single book that told any history that wasn't within the context of mental illness, crime, and sin. I got more information from the restroom glory hole.

Groups later formed to collect and write our history, but very little found its way into public education. That is why we now see, once again, right-wingers banning books and even classroom conversation about queer history and culture. Killing history is a principal way of oppressing people, and the young of today are in our same condition.

"When I am dead at the Colonnade, I am going to make this point: the young are much more interesting than we are. True, they are largely ignorant about us and everyone before us, but we are many, many times more ignorant of them. Yes, in terms of queer identity, we're leaving them improved personal circumstances, but they are nonetheless living in a far more difficult world than we did."

Remember that identity among queer people is not a simple reduction to sexual difference. Our collective identities, as many scholars have noted, are also shaped by the values of the time in which we come of age. For example, I grew up in the puritanical, intolerant sewer of boomers that erupted into the period of alternative culture and radical politics. So, despite sacrificing everything to comply with normative values by getting married for five years at 20, I soon burst out of the closet with the support of other boomers-gone-hippie. By the '90s, I was writing a biweekly gay column for ETC magazine, "Out of Bounds," that seemed to enrage every homosexual in the city. "You are exactly the kind of gay person we do not want to represent us," I was frequently told.

It was true that my values were quite different from most of those still in the boomer mentality, hoping above all to be "normal." We the abnormal created our own communities like Midtown, when it was affordable. I and my friends in San Francisco

PHOTO BY SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / ALESSANDROBIASCIOLI

(I was bicoastal) reveled in being deviants. Many of us opposed marriage. We preached, like the immensely popular drag queens of today, that being an outsider confers insight and an adventurous life. Meanwhile, the would-be-normal here walked out of the closet dressed like lawyers and many seriously tried to ban those drag queens from Pride floats, along with leather boys and anyone else exhibiting unconventional sexual expression. Atlanta's Pride celebration attracts 10,000 people, probably a majority straight, and the old gays are worried sick that a child will see a sexual act and be traumatized for life. That is the same decrepit argument that wrecked the adventure of the glory hole.

Succeeding generations — X, Millennial, and Z — battled AIDS, won marriage rights, and — contrary to what old people think — created gay venues in digital spaces that are affordable, inclusive, and do not preclude in-person interactions. They even provide access to gay history! Millennial queer people have moved sexual and gender identity beyond the binaries. Pronouns cause the eyes of us older people to roll and rattle, but we rarely look closely. There's much to see. Meanwhile, the general culture's elders bask in the greedy, mean-spirited capitalism that demands, "If I had to pay off my school loans, there's no reason you shouldn't have to do the same," even though it was 50 years ago with a two percent interest rate.

When I am dead at the Colonnade, I am going to make this point: the young are much more interesting than we are. True, they are largely ignorant about us and everyone before us, but we are many, many times more ignorant of them. Yes, in terms of queer identity, we're leaving them improved personal circumstances, but they are nonetheless living in a far more difficult world than we did. You don't have to be proud of being gay, Daddy, and you don't have to think the young are dumb to admit your own ignorance and try a little tenderness.

WHY STONEWALL?

María Helena Dolan

Read the full column online at thegavoice.com.

Karla Jay — a professor emeritus at Pace University, a pioneer lesbian feminist who plotted zaps like the infamous Lavender Menace, an activist who worked in the trenches for decades and who should be a revered queer public intellectual — works at scene setting for "Why Stonewall?" in the documentary, "Stonewall at 50," available on *YouTube*.

"It's hard for people today to imagine how awful our lives were," Jay says in the documentary. "Whoever was the current mayor would say that he was cleaning up the prostitution, he was going to get rid of the perverts, and the bars would be raided more frequently. It was illegal for two people of the same sex to dance together, to not wear clothes of your own gender."

"At a raid, if you had a student ID, they would call the school and tell them you had been in the bar," she continues. "They would call your employer, call your parents — anybody that they could call, they would call. Your landlord. So, without ever having been arrested, you could lose everything."

Stonewall had to be in the Village. The Village was an actual neighborhood, where people lived amid a rich history with a swirling panoply of intellectual, political, cultural, and artistic thought and movements, sexual nonconformity, coffee houses (performance spaces), clubs, and theaters. Marcel Duchamp once proclaimed it, "The Independent Republic of Greenwich Village." Rents were affordable. Permission was widespread.

But why this particular Mafia-run sleazo dive with watered down drinks, filthy toilets, no fire escape, and no running water, so glasses just got fished through a tub and then reused?

"It's hard for people today to imagine how awful our lives were. Whoever was the current mayor would say that he was cleaning up the prostitution, he was going to get rid of the perverts, and the bars would be raided more frequently. It was illegal for two people of the same sex to dance together, to not wear clothes of your own gender."

— Karla Jay

Veteran Tommy Lanigan Schmidt was a 17-year-old runaway and came to Stonewall for one reason.

"You could put a few coins in the jukebox and choose a romantic ballad, and for the first time you felt like a human being," he said, according to "The Gay Revolution — The Story of the Struggle" by Lillian Faderman. "Everyone else could slow dance in their high school, and everywhere else, something I could never do. And that was the first time I saw same-sex dancing … holding on to one other person without the fear that someone is going to bash you over the head is totally centering. So, going to the Stonewall grounded me and the Stonewall riots just brought that feeling out into the real world."

In the documentary. "Beyond Stonewall." from the Smithsonian Channel, Stonewall Veteran Mark Segal says, "We were second, third, fourth class citizens. We could hang out here. We could be arrested out on the street. So, this was safe."

New to New York and to being out, Segal recounts: "Sitting in the bar, all of the sudden the lights kept flickering on and off. I asked, 'What's going on?' [The drag queens] were casual: 'Oh, just another raid.'"

Stonewall riots HISTORICAL IMAGE VIA WIKICOMMONS

"That sent off alarm bells in me," he continued. "But the police had no use for [the white, middle class] me. They're going after the drag queens, and they're throwing insults around. Me? They just carded me and let me out. When I got outside, there was a little crowd. And they started applauding when someone came out."

Not everyone's riot is the same. Stonewall veteran Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, a Black trans woman, has a rather different take on it.

In a Vice News and HBO-produced video titled, "Pride Doesn't Mean What You Think It Does For This Stonewall Veteran," on YouTube, she recounts: "The interesting thing about all this is that on top of the devastation, misery and hurt that happened, we got a second dose of it when these gay guys came in and took it away from us,. What I remember is hearing the [gay men] yelling from their apartment building, 'Oh the girls are kicking the cops' ass.' That's when the shit was all about."

"There were so many ways that this could have been done that were complementary and inclusive of everybody," she continues. "Where's the respect from my community, who was a part of all this, and major part of all of this? Together we're a strong force. We're a tough group of bitches."

Why that one night in June?

On this particular June night, the hottest night of the year so far, with a giant full moon, and yes, Judy Garland's wake and the fact that the police had just raided Stonewall on Tuesday and this is Friday, and the pull of all the politics of people throwing off choking chains, with Black Liberation, Women's Liberation, Puerto Rican Liberation, liberation in Vietnam, protests with tear gas and police and Feds and truncheons and bullets, and the fact that law enforcement had brought in the female undercover cops who did the sex checks (if you were clothed in raiment that appeared to be for the sex other than the one you were apparently born into, the police could "inspect" to make sure that you were not in violation of the law).

According to "Stonewall" by Martin Duberman, Lieutenant Christopher Pine, who led the raid, said, "It was a release of energy, they could now fight back, for all the times that they had to slink away, without being able to say anything to the crap the cops were giving them. Once it broke loose, it was very contagious."

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SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE ON COMING OUT AND LGBTQ YOUTH

Emma O'Loughlin

To be completely transparent, this is the first Pride month where I've started to feel really comfortable in my own skin as a queer person. It was something that I fought for so long, and to be out and feel proud of who I am is truly one of the most freeing feelings in the world. Coming out is a lifelong process; it's not just something that happens once. We're always coming out to people, gauging the room, evaluating people and situations and deciding if the environment and people are safe to come out to. I think when people are beginning to come out, they can often feel a lot of pressure to look or act a certain way based on stereotypes.

In college, as a musical theater major, I was surrounded by so many incredibly out and proud queer people, which was amazing to witness, but looking back I subconsciously felt that my own queerness was not as valid because I wasn't out and proud in the same way they were. As I continue to navigate my own queerness and become more comfortable with who I am, I find it reassuring that being "queer" means whatever I want it to mean for me.

The representation that younger queer people have nowadays has changed a lot in the past couple of years and is vastly different from the representation my mums' generation had. Of course, there were queer music artists at the top of the charts and on screen, but my parents grew up in a time where being out wasn't something that was openly talked about. You had to find other queer people in much subtler ways than we do today.

Homosexuality was still listed as a mental disorder until 1973, when the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed it as a diagnosis from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. And while there were films portraying queer relationships that were revolutionary for their time, the stereotypes they represented were not always positive, and many older films about queer storylines ended in death and/or tragedy for the queer characters. Luckily, in the past 15 years — even the past three years — positive queer representation has made its way into the mainstream media.

'Heartstopper' PUBLICITY PHOTO

These media in the past couple of years have had an enormous impact on my coming out journey. Having queer television shows and films that accurately portray the queer experience and influential gay artists like Lil Nas X are essential representation for young queer people. Seeing a talented queer artist making art about his queerness and becoming even more successful for it was one of the things that helped me embrace my sexuality. One of the biggest moments that impacted me was the scene in "Schitt's Creek" when David speaks to Stevie about liking "the wine, not the label." Watching this, something inside of me clicked and I suddenly thought to myself, "Wait, that's me! That is exactly how I would describe my sexuality." It was the first time I'd seen a pansexual character onscreen, and it was pure and simple the way the writers went about it; it wasn't treated as a huge deal, it was just David living his life, buying a bottle of wine.

The new Netflix show, "Heartstopper," instantly became one of my favorite shows. The representation of the LGBTQ community is so beautiful to see, and I know if I'd had a show like that when I was younger, I probably would have come out a lot sooner. While media like this is something I wish I had when I was growing up, I am elated to know that kids can watch something like it and know that things will be okay. It's also great to know that queer representation can only get better and more inclusive from here on out.

The word "community" is one of the first words I think of when I think about the queer experience as a whole. The idea that it's important to have a community as a human being has been stripped away as hyper individualism has risen to combine with capitalist practices. Being surrounded by people like me, who understand my experience, has also had a positive impact on my coming out.

I recognize that I am coming from a place of privilege writing about this while living in an extremely urban and queer-friendly area. After college, I moved to a different city from all my friends, and the significance of community wasn't something I fully understood until it was gone. If I could send a message to young queer people, it would be that you don't have to come out before you're ready, but when you do, just know that there's a wonderful community of people here to support you. You are not alone.

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It's time to end the culture wars and time to make sure that all of Georgia, from border to coast, from the south to the north, has the economy to support keeping our best and brightest here, affordable housing so we can raise our families in our community of choice and better infrastructure to move us from place to place.

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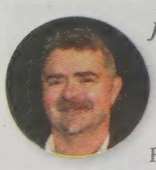
Show Creator and Cast Talk About the New 'Queer as Folk'

Ryan O'Connell and Johnny Sibilly star in Peacock's "Queer as Folk." COURTESY PHOTO



Jim Farmer

For many of the principals of the new version of "Queer as Folk," the original series not only entertained them but eventually inspired them, including cast members Ryan O'Connell and Johnny Sibilly.

"I was a horny, closeted 12-year-old going to Blockbuster Video with sunglasses on, praying no one would notice me and watching it under the covers and masturbating furiously," O'Connell said of the US. version, which ran from 2000 to 2005. He plays the character of Julian, a pop culture nerd with cerebral palsy. Julian is longing for independence.

Sibilly, who plays successful lawyer Noah, remembers watching that version early on as well, knowing that he was not supposed to be watching it.

"I was 12 or 13, flipping through the networks," he said. "It was one of the first times I saw what queer life looked like and would look like for me. It was exciting and overwhelming and captivating and really hot. Watching as I got older, it was great to see queer people on TV being queer."

Show creator Stephen Dunn, who also served as a writer, executive producer and director on the series, watched the U.S. version in his basement with the volume way down and rented the U.K. version, which aired from 1999 to 2000, while he was in high school.

Now streaming on Peacock, the new "Queer as Folk" hopes to be as groundbreaking as its two predecessors. Dunn describes it as being about a community rebuilding in the wake of a tragedy and navigating a bigger, safer space. In addition to newer faces such as Fin Argus, Devin Way, CG and Jesse James Keitel, the series also stars Kim Cattrall and Juliette Lewis.

Dunn began developing the show five years ago and knew at the time any version that existed today had to reflect the current social climate — what is it like to exist as a queer person?

"So much has changed in the last 20 years and the definition of the word queer has evolved," Dunn said. "I think we're at a time when the existence and amplification of queer voices, stories and representation feel more important than it ever does given the climate and what we're experiencing as a culture. [In the show], you see queer joy, resilience and defiance on the screen in an unapologetic way."

For O'Connell, he too felt there was a lot to say.

"It's been 22 years since the U.S. version and so much of what has defined queerness has been updated and conversations around diversity and inclusion have deepened and changed," he said. "We are able to make a show in 2022 that we never could make in 1999. 1999 was beyond groundbreaking and amazing, but now we can bring to the forefront and include characters like mine that were not included in the original. It doesn't feel like woke, intersectional bingo. It feels real and lived in. These people are not just holograms of their identity and their marginalization."

Julian is deeply loving and wants to be loved, the actor — who also is one of the co-executive producers and writers — said. "It was rewarding to start him off as a salty bitch, but you do see his defenses go down."

He and Cattrall had never met, and he was nervous beforehand. They met on the first day of filming.

"Kim was formative to my experience as a human," O'Connell said. "I worshipped at the altar of 'Sex and the City' and especially Samantha Jones. I was immediately at ease with her. She is so funny and bright."

Sibilly's character is a lot more complex than you might anticipate from the first moments.

"When most people see Noah from the outside, he is this cis daddy who has it all going on, the job, the house, the sex, but what he keeps inside is a lot of a volcano of emotion and messiness and lot of unhealed trauma," he said. "He reminds me of gay men I know who don't allow you to see behind the curtain.

The actor is quite prominent this season. He also stars in "Hacks" as Wilson, the boyfriend of Marcus (Carl Clemons-Hopkins).

"Queer as Folk" is now streaming on Peacock.

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'Dear Queer Self' is an Accepting Love Letter to Younger Self

Conswella Bennett

"Dear Queer Self: An Experiment in Memoir" is a third memoir from queer author Jonathan Alexander. This time around, Alexander wanted to get a little more personal.

Alexander, a Chancellor's Professor of English at the University of California, Irvine, wrote the first two books of the trilogy, "Creep: A Life, a Theory, an Apology" and "Bullied: The Story of An Abuse" to rave reviews several years ago.

In the beginning of his writing, Alexander thought his latest book would take on the mantra, 'it gets better,' but instead he realized it was more about personal acceptance, he said in an interview with *Georgia Voice*.

"It's letters to my younger self," Alexander said. "I discovered I had a lot of affection for my younger self, and I started to admire him."

Like many people trying to come to terms with their sexuality, Alexander recalled that he endured a lot and struggled to even accept himself. He later realized that he had internalized many of his family trauma and the world's negative views around homosexuality. This was due in part because of his upbringing in the deeply religious South and trying to navigate life. Jonathan grew up in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The book focuses on three pivotal years: 1989, 1993 and 1996. Those years Jonathan recalled were times when big things were happening not only in his life but in the world – him graduating from college, the rise of the AIDS crisis, the fall of the Berlin Wall (which many thought might lead to more democracy), election of Democratic President Bill Clinton, and the seeming advancement of rights for LGBTQ people.

"Dear Queer Self" is more than just a book; it also comes with its own playlist. Each of the three sections includes a YouTube playlist surrounding the years Alexander explores. Chapters in the book are named after pop songs from these years, such as "Giving You the Best that I Got" by Anita Baker (1989) and "Who Will Save Your Soul" by Jewel (1996).

In writing this book of love letters and acceptance to himself, Alexander hopes readers will be able to resonate with some of the similar feelings and struggles of accepting not only himself but also his sexuality.

"I always want people to feel that they are not alone," he said.

"I hope people realize that there is a lot in our culture that keeps us separate, and that's a shame," Alexander continued. "We are afraid of each other. I was afraid of being different. Our culture makes us afraid to be different."

He is hopeful that "Dear Queer Self" will help readers to be gentle with themselves as they learn to accept and come to terms with who they are and not give into the negative.

So far since its release in March by Acre Books, "Dear Queer Self" has been praised by members of the LGBTQ community. Although there are no book tours slated for Atlanta, Jonathan said he is open to it, and would love to return to Atlanta to discuss his latest book.

"Dear Queer Self" can be purchased at Charis Books and More (charisbooksandmore.com) or at acre-books.com.

Queer author Jonathan Alexander COURTESY PHOTO

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SOMETIMES 'Y' RYAN LEE

FUEL 'SHORT'-AGE: LESS IS BEST

Ryan Lee

As the American Taliban prepares to celebrate its seizure of women's bodies and autonomy via an imminent U.S. Supreme Court decision, our nation's rigid gender proscriptions are under assault on a different front during the opening weeks of "Hot Boy Summer." Forced under veil since at least the mid-1980s, the male thigh is being liberated of excessive fabric as heterosexual men catch onto the trend of wearing "hoochie daddy shorts."

It's been at least a decade since I've worn shorts that cover more than 20 percent of my legs. There's no point in being gay if you can't have fun with flamboyancy, just as there's no point in running marathons or going on 100-mile bicycle rides if you can't flash a little flesh below the waist.

Legs tend to be the last asset the modern male body holds onto, their shape and tone suggesting a fitness or athleticism that a man's cheeks, arms and torso often belie. I've always pitied how constrained heterosexual men must be in their expressions — whether with emotions or fashion — even as they and straight women give me a side-eye for the amount of quadriceps and hamstring hanging out of my shorts.

My bicycle lessens the judgment I've endured over my fashion choices, since when I'm riding or socializing on my bike, my signature button-up shirt/short shorts combo turns from quirky to quintessential. There's a prurient aspect of my bicycle's appearance that makes it logical to look like a slut while riding it.

While I feel a smidge of relief in no longer being on the fringes of fashion, there are other elements of my brand of "biker boy swag" I wish would suddenly become stylish. The volume of reproach I've received about the length of shorts a man is supposed to wear is drowned out by the derision I've experienced about the type of transportation a man is supposed to rely on.

PHOTO BY SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / VITPHO

More than 20 years of being carless has revealed the existential value Americans bestow on automobiles — how we are wholly dependent on an invention that promised independence, how the type of vehicle we or others drive reflects our success and determines our worth. Ironically, every driver who has called me an idiot for cycling in the street, or every potential romance who was dissuaded from a relationship because I didn't drive a car, would probably be envious of my gasoline bill the last few months.

This is not a call-to-pedals or a victory lap over American auto culture. The despair so many feel over fuel prices is palpable and pitiable, especially for those who have been convinced they can't navigate or persevere through life without a car.

The prohibitive attitude our society has toward alternative forms of transportation is as arbitrary as our regulation of male fashion. Just as more men are beginning to enjoy the warmth of the sun on their pasty thighs, I hope more Americans discover how more freely they can move when they stray outside the traditional rules of the road.

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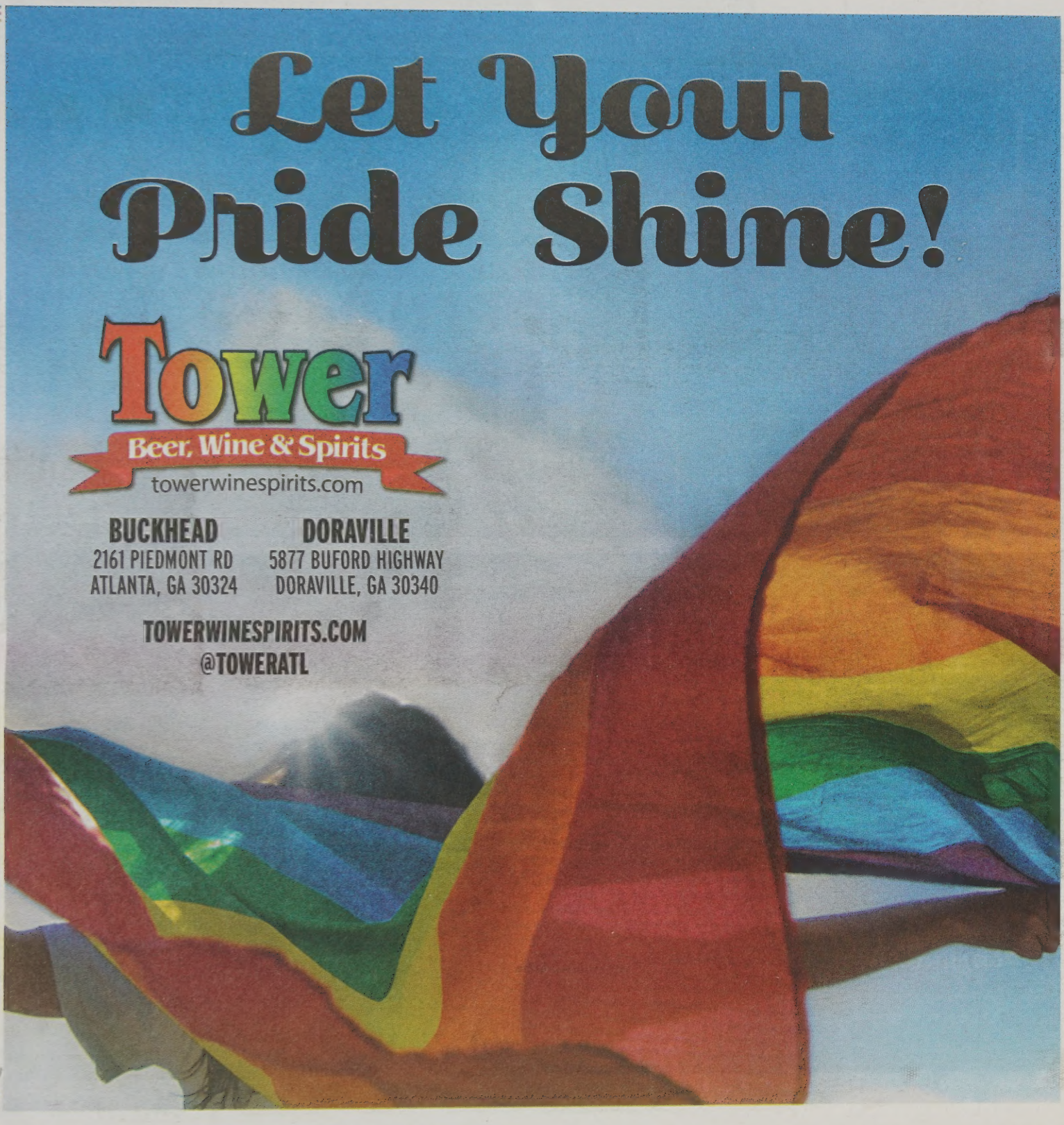
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FURRY FRIEND OR **FURRY FAMILY?**

Katie Burkholder

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In last year's pet issue, I wrote an editorial about how animals are like children in that they are both unable to communicate and defend themselves, and the way one treats each is indicative of the quality of their character. Recently, though, I had firsthand experience that taught me just how similar having a pet is to having a child. They're annoying at times, you love the hell out of them, and you are entirely responsible for keeping them alive.

My dad went on a six-month Buddhist residency, and I was tasked with caring for my two childhood cats: Puffypants and Mittens. They're siblings, from the same litter, and they've been in my family since the moment they were born, about 12 years ago. To say I love these cats is an understatement, and that love grew so much deeper when it became my sole responsibility to take care of them.

To preface this story, I have to note that Puffypants is the fattest cat you've ever seen. He is the poster child for gluttony, so it's a common occurrence for him to eat his food way too quickly and immediately throw it up. So when I came across cat vomit, I didn't think anything of it. I just cleaned it up and went about my day.

After several days of cleaning up barf, however, I noticed Mittens had stopped eating altogether. I put out her food like normal, and she wouldn't touch it. Mittens is notoriously picky, so I didn't panic. I bought the most expensive cat food at the grocery store, I put out her favorite treats, I even cooked her chicken. She wouldn't touch any of it, and I started to panic.

During this same time, I was finishing a COVID-19 quarantine and my car got towed. So it was a couple days before I was able to take her to the vet. During those two or so days, she quickly lost almost all her weight and started isolating herself in the corner of my bathroom. My childhood pet was dying before my very eyes, and save for my grandmother on her death bed, it was the saddest thing I'd ever seen.

Luckily, I was able to take her to the vet just in time. They gave her an IV and ran some tests to deduce that she has stage 2 kidney disease, which was impacting her appetite. They gave me an appetite stimulant and a prescription for some special food, and soon she was as good as new.

Actually, she was better. Mittens had a new lease on life. Before, she could be a bit standoffish. She didn't like people petting her too much, and she would more or less keep to herself. But after, she was much more affectionate. She wanted me to pet and hold her constantly, and she would lie on my chest while I was in bed (something she never did before). Mittens had known she was going to die, and I think she knew that, without my help, she wouldn't have survived. Every time she went to the bathroom to isolate herself and die, I took her out, held and kissed her, and told her she was going to be all right. I took her to the vet, and she came back feeling great. I swear to god, she knew that I did all of that for her. She knew that I kept her alive, and she was genuinely grateful.

Cats get a bad rap for not being the most loving animals, but after that experience, I truly felt like she loved me — or, at the very least, I knew with 100 percent certainty that she knew I loved her.

Our pets aren't just our companions and buddies. They're our family, just as our own children are. That experience cost me an arm and a leg and some serious emotional distress, but protecting and caring for Mittens, I experienced a love so deep and sacrificial, I truly felt like a mother. That is a feeling I will cherish for the rest of my life, and once Mittens does eventually pass away, I know I'll mourn her with the same devastation I would any other member of my family. For now, though, I'm eternally grateful that she's alive and I get to enjoy the privilege of loving her for a little while longer.

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Sens. Ossoff, Warnock Working to Address HIV/AIDS Epidemic in Metro Atlanta with New Grant

U.S. Senators Reverend Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff have secured new resources to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Metro Atlanta area.

Sens. Ossoff and Warnock announced new resources for the Fulton County's Department for HIV Elimination to help Georgians with HIV/AIDS access the health care, treatment, and support services they need.

The U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration awarded approximately $115 million to 60 HIV/AIDS Bureau EHE recipients to link people with HIV who are either newly diagnosed, or are diagnosed but currently not in care, to essential HIV care and treatment and support services. Almost $4 million has gone to Atlanta, with Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton, and Gwinnett Counties as priority areas of focus.

The new resources will also help provide workforce training and technical assistance.

"Working alongside Senator Warnock, I will continue strengthening health care services, facilities, and access for the people of Georgia. The fight against HIV/AIDS continues, and this investment will help prevent and treat disease," Sen. Ossoff said in a release.

"I've long been committed to fighting for care and justice for those living with HIV, and as a voice for Georgians in the Senate I'm proud to continue that work as a lawmaker," said Sen. Warnock. "The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that what impacts one of us impacts all of us, so I'm proud that we were able to secure vital federal investments to combat the HIV epidemic."

Atlanta's Out on Film Announces First Wave of Films for 35th Festival

Out on Film has announced the first five films that will comprise the 35th edition of the Oscar® qualifying Atlanta-based LGBTQ film festival, held from September 22 to October 2, 2022.

U.S. Senators Reverend Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff. PHOTO VIA FACEBOOK

The five films are Bryan Darling and Jesse Finley Reed's All Man: The International Male Story, Micheal Rice's Black As U R, Matt Carter's In From the Side, Daresha Kiyi's Mama Bears and Connie Cocchia's When Time Gets Louder.

"We are very excited to celebrate our landmark 35th anniversary," Jim Farmer, Out On Film's festival director, said in a statement. "Last year's event — a hybrid festival with in-person screenings and guests and a virtual one as well — was very successful, with more than 155 films in all, and we look forward to another great event this season."

The full schedule will be announced August 22. A special July 23 double feature of the comedic "Cop Secret" and the lesbian romantic comedy "Girl Picture" will begin the Countdown to 35 series. It will take place at 7pm at Out Front Theatre Company, serving as a first preview of this year's festival.

For information on purchasing passes, tickets, and additional details on Out on Film, please go to outonfilm.org.

GLAAD Gives Social Media Failing Grades Over Lack of Protections for LGBTQ Users

GLAAD, the world's largest LGBTQ media advocacy organization, released the findings of its second annual Social Media Safety Index (SMSI), a report on LGBTQ user safety across five major social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok.

The outcome reveals that all platforms fail to protect the safety of LGBTQ users.

The 2022 SMSI introduces a Platform Scorecard, which utilizes twelve LGBTQ-specific indicators to generate numeric ratings with regard to LGBTQ safety, privacy, and expression. After reviewing the platforms on measures like explicit protections from hate and harassment for LGBTQ users, offering gender pronoun options on profiles, and prohibiting advertising that could be harmful and/or discriminatory to LGBTQ people, all platforms scored under a 50 out of a possible 100:

- Instagram: 48 percent
- Facebook: 46 percent
- Twitter: 45 percent
- YouTube: 45 percent
- TikTok: 43 percent

Primary Platform Scorecard indicators include:

- The company should disclose a policy commitment to protect LGBTQ users from harm, discrimination, harassment, and hate on the platform.
- The company should disclose an option for users to add pronouns to user profiles.
- The company should disclose a policy that expressly prohibits targeted deadnaming and misgendering of other users.
- The company should clearly disclose what options users have to control the company's collection, inference, and use of information related to their sexual orientation and gender identity.
- The company should disclose training for content moderators, including those employed by contractors, that trains them on the needs of vulnerable users, including LGBTQ users.

"Today's political and cultural landscapes demonstrate the real-life harmful effects of anti-LGBTQ rhetoric and misinformation online," said GLAAD President and CEO Sarah Kate Ellis. "The hate and harassment, as well as misinformation and flat-out lies about LGBTQ people, that go viral on social media are creating real-world dangers, from legislation that harms our community to the recent threats of violence at Pride gatherings. Social media platforms are active participants in the rise of anti-LGBTQ cultural climate and their only response can be to urgently create safer products and policies, and then enforce those policies."

Judge Temporarily Blocks LGBTQ Discrimination Protections in Work and Schools

Katie Burkholder

A federal judge has temporarily blocked enforcement of two directives pushed by the Biden administration protecting LGBTQ people in schools and workplaces from discrimination, according to the *Washington Post*.

U.S. District Judge Charles Atchley Jr. of the Eastern District of Tennessee ruled in favor of 20 state attorneys general who claimed the Biden administration's guidance infringes upon states' rights, arguing that the directives would have put them at risk of losing federal funding because of their existing laws.

"Defendant's guidance directly interferes with and threatens Plaintiff States' ability to continue enforcing their state laws," Atchley wrote in his ruling. "Their sovereign power to enforce their own legal code is hampered by the issuance of Defendants' guidance and they face substantial pressure to change their state laws as a result."

According to the attorneys general who filed the lawsuit, the Biden administration exercised an authority that "properly belongs to Congress, the States, and the people." Atchley agreed with the state attorneys general that the Education Department, in a West Virginia lawsuit, had attempted to enforce its guidance by filing a statement of interest claiming Title IX prohibits the state from preventing transgender girls from participating in girls' athletics.

"Defendants would be allowed to use the 'fear of future sanctions' to force 'immediate compliance' with the challenged guidance," Atchley wrote.

The administration's guidance was issued by the Education Department and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) following a Supreme Court ruling in 2020 that said that Title VII, a civil rights provision prohibiting job discrimination because of sex, includes discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The directives would have applied to educational institutions receiving federal funding, as well as most employers, to extend protections for transgender people to use bathrooms and locker rooms and join sports teams that align with their gender identity.

"The Department of Education strives to provide schools with the support they need to create learning environments that enable all students to succeed, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation," Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Suzanne B. Goldberg said in a statement announcing the guidance in 2021. "Equity in education means all students have access to schools that allow them to learn and thrive in all aspects of their educational experience," said Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Suzanne B. Goldberg. "As part of our mission to protect all students' civil rights, it is essential that OCR acts to eliminate discrimination that targets LGBTQ students."

The states in question represented by the attorneys general include Georgia, as well as Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, and West Virginia.

The injunction will remain in place "pending the final resolution of this matter," according to Atchley's decision, or until further orders are given from the district court or higher courts.

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Angels Among Us Rescues At-Risk Furry Friends

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANGELS AMONG US RESCUE

Sukainah Abid-Kons

When two women with backgrounds in occupational therapy and finance decided to work together in their shared passion of rescuing abandoned and abused pets, they imagined helping a handful of dogs from local shelters. Thirteen years later, their foundation Angels Among Us Pet Rescue (Angels Rescue) has saved 19,000 pets from euthanasia and at-risk situations.

"We just wanted to rescue a couple of dogs," LuAnn Farrell, one of the co-founders of Angels Rescue, told *Georgia Voice*. "I started finding that there were a lot of dogs and cats in shelters that needed to be rescued, so I went ahead and started joining other people through email."

After moving to Georgia, Farrell started volunteering at an animal shelter in Forsyth County, where she saw dogs needing help.

Through emailing other pet lovers, Farrell and her co-founder Valerie Addington would pull dogs out of shelters, vet them, connect them with a foster home, and help them move up north to another rescue that Farrell had worked with in the past.

"It was so incredibly organic," Farrell continued, commenting on how Angels Rescue grew into the lifeline for many animals that it is today. Working with volunteers, many of whom also worked in other fields but shared Farrell's love for animals, Angels Rescue was able to set up a system for finding dogs foster homes, as well as permanent families.

Angels Rescue is not a typical rescue foundation; it has no physical facility, but rather works with a network of pet fosterers and volunteers to save dogs and cats from abusive situations, animal control facilities, or shelters that are at capacity. In Georgia, their work is needed now more than ever.

During the pandemic, millions of Americans added a pet to their household. Some data suggests that as many as one in five pet-owning households adopted during this time, and plenty of people became first-time pet owners as well. But over the past year as people have returned to work, shelters have seen increasing numbers of dogs and cats surrendered to their care.

"People are dumping them like crazy now," Farrell said. Additionally, some pet owners are turning to online resources for rehoming their pets, which can lead to cats and dogs ending up in unsafe homes as a result of less intensive vetting processes.

Farrell went on to explain that many shelters and rescues in the Atlanta area are full, leading to some facilities euthanizing animals when they are no longer able to take in more pets.

"There [are] just too many animals and not enough people," she said.

Still, Farrell and her fellow volunteers are committed to their mission of rescuing as many pets as they can. But that also depends on addressing the root of the problem: there are too many pets to realistically be adopted. Farrell's suggestion to pet owners and animal lovers? Make sure that your pets are spayed and neutered. This, she explained, helps reduce the number of accidental litters, many of which end up in shelters. If you aren't a pet owner, but are still passionate about saving animals, helping to educate individuals or families about the benefits of spaying and neutering their pets is also important.

Farrell also pointed out that shelters across the country are in need of volunteers at the moment.

Even during the post-pandemic stress many rescues are facing, Farrell stays motivated to continue helping dogs and cats in need. Her lifelong love of animals encouraged her to start Angels Rescue, and it continues 19,000 rescues later.

If you are interested in volunteering with Angels Rescue or making a donation, you can find more information at www.angelsrescue.org. If you are interested in helping your local ASPCA shelter or donating to the organization, you can find more information at www.aspca.org

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A Step-By-Step Guide to Finding Pet Insurance

Troy Stapek

As a pet owner, you want to make sure that you have done everything in your power to provide your furry friend with the best life possible. That is why, of all the many things you should be doing to prepare to welcome them into your home, signing them up for pet insurance as soon as you can is a top priority.

Figuring out how pet insurance works can feel a bit overwhelming to those who are new to the pet world. There are so many options, despite the basic goal being essentially the same. So, if you are like the rest of us, you are probably wondering how pet insurance works and how to choose the right one.

In general, you know you have found the best pet insurance option when you feel it will provide you with the most peace of mind and the best value for coverage inclusions. But how do you actually know for sure you have picked the right one?

This is where we come in to help. We understand just how important this decision is. There is nothing more stressful than having to make a difficult decision between your pet's medical needs and maxing out a credit card or going into debt.

So, we have put together this step-by-step guide on how to find the best pet insurance and confidently sign up for a policy that has you and your pets' backs in times of need.

Defining Pet Insurance

First things first: what even is pet insurance? Let's talk about the basics first so you understand why you and your pet need it. In the most simplistic of terms, pet insurance is similar to medical insurance for people. The policies are designed to be there and provide support when the unexpected happens, so when it comes time to have to pay the medical bills, you won't be overwhelmed by financial burdens and can get all the medical support needed for the health situation.

PHOTO BY ISTOCK.COM / MONKEYBUSINESSIMAGES

Also similar to human medical insurance is the fact that there are numerous levels of coverage to choose from. Some pet insurance policies only cover unexpected accidents and illnesses. Others include proactive wellness treatments, but come with a higher premium to pay each month as a result.

Considerations for Your Pet

When searching for pet insurance, you want to make the decision based on your own pet's individual needs and current state of well-being. The best policies welcome pets of all ages and breeds. You will also want to understand the coverage rules regarding preexisting conditions, should your pet have any.

Also, if you have more than one pet, you want to find a pet insurance plan that lets you bundle all the furry friend coverage into one straightforward package — ensuring your pets all get the same love, support, and access to medical care.

Considerations for Pet Insurance Providers

Next, it is important to do your due diligence when searching for the best pet insurance plans. After you assess whether they will support your pet's individual needs and circumstances, you'll want to compare your options with as many competing providers as possible. This will help you really understand the value from a financial perspective as well.

You will also want to clarify what the waiting periods are so that you do not get any nasty surprises once your policy kicks in. In general, the waiting periods for pet insurance policies should never exceed two weeks when it comes to illnesses.

Finally, you will want to evaluate the reimbursement portion of the policy. The best pet insurance plans will offer 90 percent reimbursement of veterinary bills, regardless of the clinic you took your pet to throughout

"When searching for pet insurance, you want to make the decision based on your own pet's individual needs and current state of well-being. The best policies welcome pets of all ages and breeds. You will also want to understand the coverage rules regarding preexisting conditions, should your pet have any."

North America.

Do They Offer Wellness Treatment Support

Another factor that can be a real make-or-break scenario with your pet insurance plans is whether or not the policy will allow for wellness treatments. As we mentioned earlier, this is a super critical component for the long-term well-being of your pet.

While there will likely be more of an upfront cost in your policy, you will be able to take a more proactive approach to your pet's health care. This means they will likely need less medical attention as they age, which in turn will save you money in the long run.

The more add-ons and additional services your pet insurance plan offers, the better. Plus, the bigger companies are often better, because they can offer you around the clock customer care to support you for any questions or emergency situations.

Finding pet insurance is much easier once you understand how it works. Keeping the above in mind, you can sign up for a pet insurance policy knowing your pet will be in good care.

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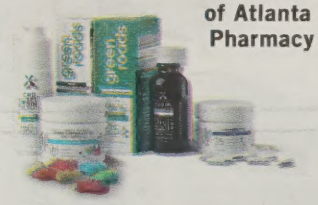

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Pet Shopping Guide

Katie Burkholder

Our furry friends deserve gifts too! Whether it's a special occasion or they've just been a good boy, these gifts from The Pet Set are sure to make your pet's day.

A. Pooch Outfitters Lydia Raincoat
Your pooch can be stylish even on rainy days! This retro-print raincoat is made of easy to clean polyester, making it the paw-fect look for rainy walk through the neighborhood or a muddy romp at the dog park. **$42.50**

B. Mirage Pet Products Two Row Confetti Crystal Puppy Ice Cream Collar
Your sweet pup is sure to be the most glam girl at the park with this rainbow crystal collar. Comes in black, bubblegum pink, and red. **$22.99**

C. VIP Products Silly Squeakers Bottles
The best gift for man's best friend! These fun, squeaky toys are made of a custom blend of vinyl that will surely make them your dog's favorite toys, and yours too! They come in a variety of styles, from Bad Spaniels (Jack Daniels) to Heinie Sniffn (Heineken). **$12.99-$15.99**

D. Yeowww! Stinkies Catnip Sardines
Each of the three colorfully embroidered eye-catching fishies is a keeper, and naturally filled to the gills with YEOWWW! catnip. **$3.68**

E. Ethical Products Spin About 2.0 Laser Toy
Spinning ribbons, blinking laser light, and robotic sound effects will entertain your kitty for hours. **$23.99**

F. Earthbath Hypoallergenic Fragrance-Free Grooming Wipes
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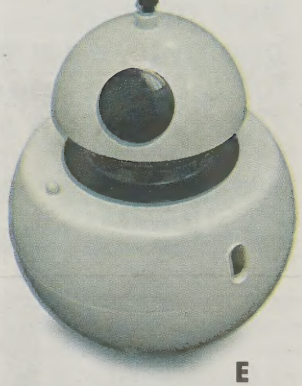

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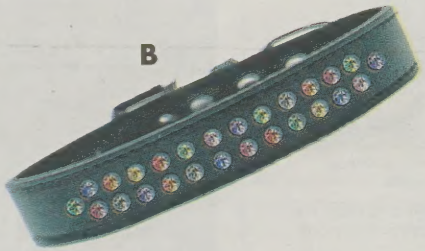

B

D

Pets of the Georgia Voice

Readers and contributors share the adorable furry families

Berko

Owner: Buck Jones

Berko, also known as Mr. Berks or Berkshire depending on our mood, is twelve years old. He's named after a local cupcake boutique in Paris because when he was a little puppy he looked like a cute mini cupcake. He took his first trip when he was only six months old, to Mykonos, Greece, where he fell in love with the sun. Since then, he's traveled to over fifteen countries across Europe and North America, by train, plane, and automobile.

Jett

Owner: Jean Bartlett

Jett on his way to work with me. He goes every day since he is bottle fed. I got him at two-and-a-half weeks old. He is eight weeks old as of July 6.

Quiz

Owner: Cliff Bostock

Quiz is the most weirdly affectionate cat anyone has ever met. For the first year, she routinely came into my office to sit in clients' laps and lick their masked faces. She is eerily vocal — often cooing in a high pitch more than purring — but I've only seen her get angry twice, due to some pain related to her now declining health. She has, in a way, brought me humane relief during the isolation and fear of the never-ending pandemic.

Hikaru Lola

Owner: Elbot Carmen

I met Lola as an eight-month-old puppy shortly after moving to Georgia in 2011, and she quickly grew to be a treasured family member. Her sassy, dramatic demeanor lightened many of the darker moments of years past. She unfortunately passed away from sudden heart failure in October of 2021 after a decade of companionship. Her ashes rest on a memorial shelf in my home alongside her favorite toy and blanket. During her life, she served as the inspiration for the protagonist of the Lola the Buhund book series.

Fortryllet Akarui Zelda

Owner: Elbot Carmen

Zelda joined me at eight weeks of age, several months after the passing of my previous Buhund. She has grown from a great deal in the few months I've had her and manages to amuse me with her antics. Socially, she seems to think everyone and everything is her friend. However, she still has yet to figure out that making a bunch of loud, excited noises isn't a good way to befriend others.

Sprite and Kristen: TikTok's Drunk Bird and Lesbian Mother Duo

Kristen Perry and her five-year-old Quaker parrot, Sprite COURTESY PHOTO

Katie Burkholder

Kristen Perry is a 30-year-old actress, filmmaker, social media influencer, and the self-proclaimed "irritated lesbian mother" of Sprite, a five-year-old Quaker parrot.

Perry got Sprite when she moved out of her parents' house and learned how lonely it could be living on her own. It was love at first … poop.

"When I got to the store, they brought him out, and he pooped on me like six times, and I was like, 'Yep, he's the one,'" Perry told *Georgia Voice*. "He was really shy when I first got him, and then after a week he got really comfortable."

Now, Sprite is anything but shy. With the help of Perry's training, Sprite has become a talented communicator, garnering him and Perry quite the social media following. Over 250,000 people follow Perry and Sprite on TikTok, where the duo make comedy sketches together. Perry has made comedy videos on social media for years, and when she began getting to know Sprite, she realized he was a comedic gold mine.

"Making videos has always been my creative outlet," she said. "One day, Sprite got his hands on a soda can that somehow fell out of the trash can. He was circling it and playing with it, and I'd never seen him that happy before ... That's when I came up with the comedy series of a drunk bird with an irritated lesbian mother. I thought that was the weirdest comedy duo, so I started writing out the scripts of Sprite and I and [sharing the videos] on Instagram and Facebook. Pretty much every single person I'd ever met in my life started watching them

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

and thought they were hilarious. It wasn't until 2020 that I downloaded TikTok, and I started putting them on there. That's when we got such a huge audience."

Perry has trained Sprite to say hundreds of words, which she bases their sketches around. His vocabulary includes "bitch," "titties," and "shut up," as well as a very sinister evil laugh. He's not always crude, though. He also says, "Kristen," "you're so cute," "bless you" when she sneezes, and "I love you."

Sprite doesn't just say these words randomly. Perry actually trained him to communicate how he's feeling.

"I trained him to do everything you see on TikTok," she said. "Originally, I was just doing it for myself, because I thought it was hilarious for him to cuss me out. Unlike other bird trainers, I train him to do the words when he feels it, not because he's doing it for treats or a whistle. For example, he calls me 'bitch' or tells me to shut up, but he only does it when he's mad. Or when I come home from work, he'll say, 'Hi! I missed you! I love you! Kisses!' He knows that's associated with happy."

She trains him by doing the action that spurred his emotional response, like touching his beer can (which he's very protective of) to make him mad, and then repeating the word she wants him to use, like "bitch."

Perry also makes social media content not involving Sprite, which includes sketches about her imagined "Generation Alpha," the generation after Generation Z, as well as videos about being a lesbian.

"I've always wanted to do lesbian content, but I've always been too scared because most of my family is very Republican," she said. "Most of them were completely against [gay marriage]. Over the years, they've all changed their minds. But I got to the point where I was on TikTok and saw so many open lesbians, and I was single so I thought, 'Oh cool, it would be great to meet somebody.' So, I made the conscious decision to come out on social media because I thought it would be a great way to meet people and meet friends, which I have."

Sprite COURTESY PHOTO

Perry's videos have garnered literally millions of likes — almost 10 million, to be exact. After two years of being on TikTok, though, she's learned to care less about the likes and more about the fun.

"In reality, [making TikToks is] really hard because of the time [commitment]," she said. "It's supposed to be a fun outlet for you, but when the views started getting really high, I started having less fun with it. I was too worried about the traffic and getting views. I stopped doing that and started going back to just do it for fun. That's when the views started going back up, because people aren't stupid; they know when you're just doing things for views."

Follow Sprite and Perry on TikTok and Instagram @kristen_perry002

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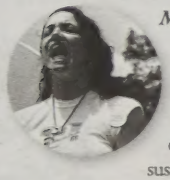
THAT NEW BRIDGE ... YOU WANNA NAME IT FOR A QUEER?



María Helena Dolan

It's 1951 and the Delaware River Port Authority (DRPA) authorizes the construction of a two-mile suspension bridge to connect Gloucester City, New Jersey, with southside Philadelphia, servicing commuters and Jersey Shore enthusiasts.

This will be bridge number two, with cranes moving into place by 1953. Its already in-service sibling is only a few miles away, bearing the lackluster title "Delaware River Bridge." But we're coming up on the semiquincentennial (250th) anniversary of the birth of Philly's always-favored son Benjamin Franklin and the Declaration of Independence, as well as the centennial of the publication of Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass."

In 1954, DRPA creates a "Special Committee on Bridge Names" and invites public comment. The Philadelphia Inquirer plays this up with multiple "Bridge Without a Name" items, and many people have strong opinions here.

American Gold Star Mothers, the national group for the mothers of the fallen, want a "Penn-Jersey Memorial Bridge" in honor of the casualties of World War II and Korea. Someone suggests President Dwight David Eisenhower for the first bridge and First Lady Mamie for the second.

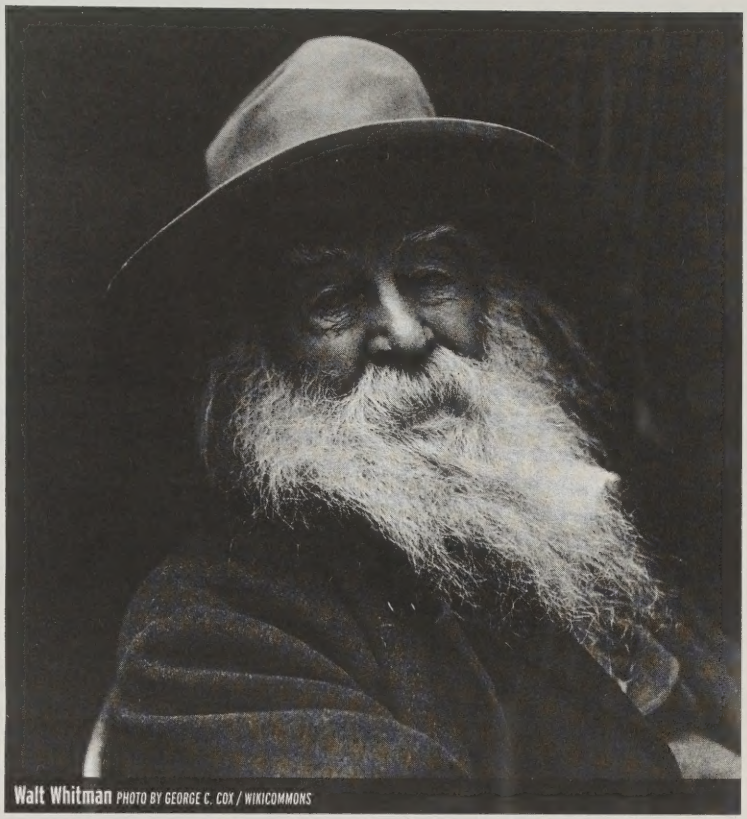
However, the committee maintains that names must be of dead historic figures. Eventually, Benjamin's name captures bridge #1, and July 1955 transforms bridge #2 into the Walt Whitman Bridge. Official pamphlets are issued.

"Fortunately, the New Jerseyan input that opposed Walt was met with sanity mostly from the Pennsylvania side, including from civic leaders and English professors. The Walt Whitman still stands. And a large, striding statue of Walt stands near the Jersey on-ramp."

Not! So! Fast! The Gloucester City Council protests, whining that DRPA didn't consult them, and "Whitman had nothing to do with Gloucester," according to the Philly History Blog, although he died in nearby Camden.

While across the country a great many Whitman/Leaves-of-Grass-Centenary love fests herald our influential, democracy-revering and "manly" national poet, numerous influential South New Jersey prelates lob a signed petition censuring Walt's selection. That is just the opening salvo for more than a year of a campaign against one of democracy's greatest champions.

As 1955 is ending, hateful heavy innuendo drops in a series of articles in The Catholic Star Herald, from the Camden diocese.



Walt Whitman PHOTO BY GEORGE C. COX / WIKICOMMONS

Increasingly angry denunciations spring up, with the Roman collar influential.

However, Catholics are not all united concerning Walt's steel suspension. For instance, an editorial in the Ave Marie, a Catholic weekly, rebuked the New Jerseyans for abandoning more important matters than the bridge's name.

But recall that during the 1950s, the temperature of the Cold War has been moving ever lower. We're swept up in convulsionary paroxysms resulting from revelations of "commie queers" within our midst, hell-bent on destroying our God-given way of life.

The queerbaiting of Walt boils up in early 1956, when DRPA receives over 500 letters with a five-point outline "debunking" Walt

"Gentlemen:
We oppose the naming of the new $90,000,000 bridge as a memorial to Walt Whitman.
(1) He is not great enough to deserve this honor. In what way has he inspired or influenced American democracy for good?
(2) He boasted of his immoralities ...
(3) He ... affirmed himself as the new savior of mankind.
(4) He attempted to teach rebellion against the natural law of God, and the right order (of things).
(5) His political philosophy, dusted off the scrap heap during the depression, as the Voice of the Common Man, has proved alien to Jeffersonian Democracy, and he is now the Poet Laureate of the World Communist Revolution.

Because the naming of the Bridge in his honor would raise him to the status of a national hero, give aid and comfort to the enemies of our established order of morality and democracy, make the teaching of religious concepts difficult, and bring the common stamp of morality on our heritage into contempt, we ask you to drop Whitman's name from the Bridge."

Fortunately, the New Jerseyan input that opposed Walt was met with sanity mostly from the Pennsylvania side, including from civic leaders and English professors. The Walt Whitman still stands. And a large, striding statue of Walt stands near the Jersey on-ramp.

PEOPLE ARE PETS, TOO

Cliff Bostock

In the mid '80s, I lived in Houston with two cats, two dogs, two enormous koi, and a lover, as we called our mates then, who was the Worst Person Alive. One day, he said something that remains the cruelest thing I've ever heard a human being say. I kicked him out the door. A few days later, I attended a conference where I met the Hottest Person Alive. He was the ultimate bad boy: a surfer dude and former International Mr. Leather who had recently moved to town from California.

He turned out to live a few blocks from me and invited me over. I explained I had to feed all the animals and walk the dogs first. He said it was no problem. "I know animals require a lot of caretaking," he said, "but they keep us happy." He laughed weirdly. I did my farm work quickly and was at his place well before I lost my erection.

I took a seat on his sofa while he fetched some lemonade. We talked briefly and he explained that he worked for the federal government and wasn't happy about his transfer. We both hated Houston's insufferable summer weather. He took off his shirt "to cool down" and slid beside me on the sofa. We were entangled immediately, and I was ready to do it there on the floor. He laughed and pushed me back. "Let's slow down. We're just getting started."

He stood up and shouted, "Come on boy!" A dog bounded into the room, gleefully woofing. Well, not really a dog. It was a younger guy wearing a collar, a harness, a disconcertingly eerie leather dog mask (or "hood") and a butt-plug tail emerging from his jock-strapped ass. This is now a fairly common sight in the leather community, but in 1985, I'd never seen anything like it. The dogboy, also wearing leather paws, continued to bounce around playfully while the former International Mr. Leather talked to him in that annoying infantilizing language you use with pets: "Yes, you're a good boy, that's right." The good boy nuzzled my hand for some petting. I was dumbstruck, but laughing. He told the dog to go to his pen — a large wire cage in the adjoining dining room. The dog went inside, stretched out, and watched us.

"You ready to have some fun?" he asked, grabbing me by the throat. We ended up in that kind of power play that made wrestling so much fun when I was a kid. I'll spare you the details, but at some point, the dog trotted into the middle of the room, softly panting until my future ex fuckbuddy gave him some command that gave him permission to join us. He rolled around, lovingly biting his trainer and a veiny chew toy … you get the picture. When I returned to my small house — the one from which I'd banished the Worst Person Alive — I got into the king-size bed with Czara, Flannery, Chester, and Margaret. Was I their master or their furry toy? When the Sweetest Person Alive, my first partner, who was dying of AIDS, called me, I asked him, "Did you know that people are pets too?"

In the years since then, so-called pup-play has become a huge movement in Europe and America. It is no longer necessarily limited

PHOTO BY SHUTTERSTOCK.COM / SMC PHOTO

to fetish play. It is as often described as a social activity in which younger queer men are mentored by dominant "handlers." Pups get together to play in groups — a "mosh." They wear hoods that are often goofy and colorful. Lest you think this is all a dark secret, check out the League of Atlanta Pups' Facebook page. There is also the global Furry Fandom of people who dress up as animals, some for sex, some not. Furries apparently do not have a power-based hierarchy like the pups and handlers. Furries aren't pets.

All of this brings to mind the common play of children, the world's mythology and folklore, pagan rituals, fairy tales, and cosplay. We presently occupy a planet that is environmentally doomed (thanks in part most recently to the Supreme Court). Consciousness, once thought to be purely human, is now regarded as something that arises in the natural world and can be shared and explored through the imagination with any being or object. Thus, occupying animal presence can literally be therapeutic. As a kink, pup play may be regarded as loony sex — it's not bestiality — but I'm here to tell you that there is no such thing as "normal" sex. No other human behavior comes as close to revealing the mysterious, eccentric animal heart of the world.

So, what happened with the leather surfer and his full-time pup? I visited frequently during the following month or two. Then one day, I received a letter from the IRS informing me that a lien had been put on my car. I appealed the decision and was summoned to a meeting. I walked into the auditor's office and — I'm not lying — he turned out to be Mr. Leather Surfer.

"You are going to remove this lien," I told him firmly. "Do you understand that?"

"No," he said, "I don't understand that. I'm completely in charge now. Get out of my office and learn to be more responsible."

Thanks a lot, dawg.

ATLANTA BLACK TRANS WOMEN'S ADVOCACY: THEN & NOW

Tracee D. McDaniel, Founder of Juxtaposed Center for Transformation

This is the second article from "Reclaiming Our Time: A History of Atlanta's Black LGBTQIA Life," a series of editorials that present vivid and personal accounts of one of the city's most definitive communities.

Dee Dee Chamblee, a trailblazing Black trans woman who founded LaGender, Inc in 2001 to address the inequities trans people experience in Atlanta. PHOTO VIA FACEBOOK

I was still in my late teens when I moved from South Carolina to Atlanta back in the late '80s. I came here without knowing anyone, not wanting to return to the home state where services were withheld from people like me. I arrived on the Greyhound bus that sunny afternoon with seven pieces of luggage in tow in anticipation of what Atlanta had to offer. I had it all planned out when I approached a taxi and I had the driver to take me to a safe shelter, because my funds were limited. Going in, I figured that if I stayed in a shelter, I'd be able to get a job and move out into my own place, sooner rather than later. Eventually I was hired as a part-time assistant director at that very shelter. In 1990, I relocated to Los Angeles to escape a toxic relationship and save my own life. I moved back to Atlanta in 2003, so that I could be within traveling distance to my mother after 9/11.

By 2006, I'd started hearing about trans, gender nonconforming and nonbinary people being denied access or mistreated by staff in the shelters where they sought safe space. Shelter staff frequently dehumanized trans residents by requiring them to change their gender expressions and answer to the wrong pronouns. Thankfully, my Mother Bear B.W. didn't kick me out of our childhood home during my formative years growing up trans in the South. Though there were challenging times with my gender identity being opposite of what was expected, no matter what, I've always known that I was loved. I was always welcomed back home anytime that was required, no matter what.

According to a *Los Angeles Blade* report on LGBTQ Homeless youth, "homelessness and housing instability were reported at higher rates among transgender and nonbinary youth, including 38 percent of transgender girls/women, 39 percent of transgender boys/men, and 35 percent of nonbinary youth, compared to 23 percent of cisgender LGBQ youth." The report cites how youth homelessness often results from families' rejection: "14 percent of LGBTQ youth reported that they had slept away from parents or caregivers because they were kicked out or abandoned, with 40 percent reporting that they were kicked out or abandoned due to their LGBTQ identity."

I was so disgusted that others weren't afforded the same opportunities I received during my stay in an Atlanta shelter. I wanted to get involved by using my voice to make a difference. As I searched to find which organizations in Atlanta were advocating for our community, the name that continued to be raised was Dee Dee Chamblee. This trailblazing Black trans woman founded LaGender, Inc in 2001 to address the inequities trans people experience in Atlanta, especially Black trans women. I also found community with like-minded people by attending the weekly support groups. I became a Certified Peer Counselor through some of the life-affirming resources that LaGender provided and still provides to this day.

Dee Dee Chamblee's example of being her own boss inspired me to establish my own 501(c)(3) organization, Juxtaposed Center for Transformation (JCT) in 2007. I started JCT to advocate for human rights and spread the good news about trans, gender nonconforming and nonbinary people. JCT celebrates our resiliency being here since the beginning of time, in every country and on every continent. During my time at LaGender, I also met my current Trans Housing Atlanta Program co-founder and colleague Jamie Roberts, a

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trans woman who works as an attorney. In 2013, Jamie organized a series of town-hall meetings to address shelters' mistreatment of trans people and develop practical solutions. Named by the late Cheryl Courtney-Evans, the Trans Housing Atlanta Program, Inc was born out of necessity. Courtney-Evans was a renowned trans activist. In 2007, she founded T.I.L.T.T. , Trans Individuals Living Their Truth, an advocacy organization providing support groups as well as resources for trans people which operated until the time of her passing in 2016. THAP is still providing monetary assistance and wraparound services to individuals and families who struggle to find housing, providing assistance for food and transportation, hotel lodging, rent and utility bills.

In 2017, Trans Housing Atlanta Program filed a grievance complaint and received a favorable ruling from the Atlanta Human Relations Commission, finding that the Atlanta Salvation Army systemically discriminated against trans, gender nonconforming and nonbinary people seeking services at a city funded organization. Thankfully, our mayor at the time was Keisha Lance Bottoms, and there was no doubt that she had our backs by doing everything within her power to create safe spaces for us all over Atlanta.

Reflecting back to my late '80s arrival, we have certainly progressed a long way from having very few trans activists or service organizations. I wish there would have been such resources available during those scary days when I was experiencing intimate partner violence. I needed a safe place to gather my thoughts and come up with a plan of action. There were many others like me during that time, facing desperate situations, who would have benefited from a hand up.

Today, there is a new generation of trans women making boss lady moves by showing up and participating for equity, because they know that our visibility saves lives.

Solutions Not Punishment (SNaP Co), headed by Toni Michelle Williams, is a Black trans- and queer-led organization that builds safety within our community, investing in our collective embodied leadership, and building political power.

Nasheedah Muhammad, a veteran organizer and administrator, is currently making things happen as Principal Consultant for capacity building firm Journey Partners LLC.

Zahara Green from Transcending Barriers is showing up and showing out. Transcending Barriers is a trans-led organization that represents incarcerated transgender and gender nonconforming people.

Jesse Pratt López is from the Trans Housing Atlanta Coalition, an Atlanta-based, trans-led and -founded organization that began as a photography and grassroots crowdfunding project aimed at getting chronically homeless Black trans women off the streets.

At Georgia Equality, Gender Policy Manager Chanel Haley is representing us well. Georgia Equality's mission is "to advance fairness, safety and opportunity for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities and our allies throughout the state."

There's always room for more practical resources for trans, gender nonconforming and nonbinary people, and if any of them are being provided by trans women of color-led organizations, the better they are at paving the way for the next generation.

Tracee D. McDaniel is an Atlanta Phoenix Award winner, Georgia House of Reps Commendation recipient, current Chairwoman serving on the Atlanta Citizen Review Board. She's a published author of "Transitions-Memoirs of a Transsexual Woman", which chronicles her Trans life being raised Baptist in South Carolina, culminating to becoming a human and civil rights advocate for trans, gender non-conforming and non-binary people.

Out Kristen Kish Co-hosts 'Iron Chef,' Trans Performer Eva Reign Headlines 'Anything's Possible'

Jim Farmer

Netflix's **"Iron Chef: Quest for an Iron Legend"** isn't just an addictive reality cooking competition series; it also boasts two out women in its cast. Kristen Kish is one of the hosts alongside Alton Brown, and Dominique Crenn is one of the titular chefs.

In 2013, during the 10th season of "Top Chef," Kish became the first woman of color to win the Bravo TV series. Soon after, she came out as a gay woman and opened her first restaurant in Austin, Texas. She jumped at the chance to co-host "Iron Chef: Quest for an Iron Legend."

"It happened relatively quickly," she told *Georgia Voice*. "I am sure there were plenty of discussions behind the scenes that I am not privy to, but from my perspective, it all happened within three weeks or so. I got a call saying the 'Iron Chef' producers were interested in talking to me and then they called back. That was it."

The competition — divided into eight 45-minute episodes — is called the toughest culinary challenge a chef will face.

"First off, it's the caliber of chefs you are competing against," Kish said. "Your competitor is at a level that is established in a lot of different ways. That, on top of the clock, is very daunting. Sixty minutes is not a long time to create four or five courses. You're also on an iconic show and it carries a lot of weight to it. That is another layer of pressure."

Having two queer women in the competition makes Kish very happy.

"It's always a wonderful thing," she said. "Representation, as we all know, matters. The best part of the casting is that it really does touch on so many people — storytelling, cultures, points of view through food, sexuality. All of these things create one dynamic round family."

She said she never thought of being a trailblazer until other people started talking about it.

"I certainly knew I was the second woman to win, and the first woman of color, and the first queer woman, and I think it's important to acknowledge," she said. "But I'm also just a chef who won the show."

The new Amazon film, **"Anything's Possible,"** marks the directorial debut of Billy Porter and stars trans performer Eva Reign as Kelsa, a high school girl. When classmate Kahl (Abubakr Ali) develops a crush on her, the two have to navigate a new dating world.

"Iron Chef: Quest for an Iron Legend"

"Anything's Possible" PUBLICITY PHOTOS

According to Reign, Kelsa is a Black trans girl about to graduate from high school who is living in Pittsburgh.

"She loves fashion, beauty and she also had a deep love for animals," Reign told Georgia Voice. "She hopes to pursue a career in science. She meets Kahl, a goofball who starts to fall for her. Through this loving bond they grow as humans and learn anything's possible."

Their relationship is not easy.

"There are a lot of bigots out there who don't want to see trans people happy and in love," Reign said. "The existence of trans people in the world challenges how some people view the world and how they can understand the world. Also, when it comes to a cisgender straight man loving a trans woman, that turns people's heads. They don't understand what that can look like. That has always existed. This film shows what that can look like in a more loving, mutual, ethical way."

Reign did not see trans narratives growing up, but did see the likes of Laverne Cox and Janet Mock, which she calls a privilege.

"I would also see the women of 'Pose' do the amazing things they have done," she said. "So, I am privileged. I came up at the crux of all this change. I have gone through some rough patches, but I have seen shifts in media during that time. I do feel a film such as this would have made a difference when I was 12 or 13."

She couldn't say enough positive things about working with Porter.

"It was amazing," Reign said. "He brings so much energy to the set every day, making everyone feel empowered. That is what his artistry is about. He wants to be the change that he needed to see when he was growing up. I feel honored to learn from him."

MORE INFO

"Iron Chef: Quest for an Iron Legend" is now airing on Netflix.
"Anything's Possible" begins streaming July 22 on Amazon Prime Video.

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LESBIANS AND THEIR **PETS**

Melissa Carter

Lesbians love their animals. Honestly, have you ever been to a lesbian's home and not seen a pet dish of some kind? Looking back on my life, I've only known one lesbian who didn't have any animals and that was only because she was severely asthmatic.

I've always had both cats and dogs in my home and, yes, they've always gotten along just fine. However, I haven't known a lot of other lesbians who own both felines and canines. They usually fiercely support one and publicly criticize the other.

But if you had to guess which animal lesbians own the most, which would you pick? If you said dogs, you'd be wrong.

According to the 2018 Autostraddle Lesbian Stereotypes Survey, most lesbians own cats. Conversely, the survey found that gay women aren't more likely to own a dog than the average heterosexual. In fact, lesbians are more likely to own cats and reptiles than our straight friends.

My son's exposure to animals depends on which parent's home he's in. Katie and I live in two separate places and take care of Mr. Carter evenly through the week. So, he's at each of his two residences for an equal amount of time, which sometimes spawns a slight competition between his mothers in certain areas of his life. One of those includes his pets.

I currently have four cats, even though I never intended to be a crazy cat lady. Mr. Carter encouraged us to adopt two kittens at the beginning of the pandemic following the death of our beloved Akima. I thought it would be a good idea, since I'd be working from home for what I thought would be the first few months of the kittens' lives. Still home when they turned a year old, a random trip to the grocery store garnered yet another abandoned kitten in the parking lot that Mr. Carter wouldn't let me get rid of. Thus, my furry brood grew quickly.

Katie Jo wasn't thrilled our son was becoming a cat guy, thinking I was having too much influence over his pet life. Since the death of our dog GiGi, there has been no pup in my house, and I have no plans to get another one any time soon. So, Katie acquired a poodle/sheepdog puppy for Mr. Carter to grow up with. Young Stella is the boisterous, bumbling fur ball any kid would love to be around.

Regardless of the debate over which animal is best, having a pet of any kind is beneficial. According to the CDC, regular walking or playing with pets can decrease blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and triglyceride levels. Pets can help manage loneliness and depression by giving us companionship, which I'm sure many appreciated these past couple of years. I've even heard of doctors of cardio patients prescribing pets, since it seems when you give love, it heals your heart.

For those who never know what to get their lesbian friends, a good bet is something to do with their pet. If she can't use it, she will definitely know someone who will.

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